

BIRIMISA

PORTRAITS, PLAYS, PERVERSIONS

THE WORK OF GEORGE BIRIMISA

EDITED BY LANNY BAUGNIET AND PAUL SAGAN



"Bravo! A beautiful, courageous play. I loved it!"

Tennessee Williams,
reviewing George Birimisa's *Georgie Porgie*

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George workshops a scene from *Viagra Falls* in the Coffeehouse Chronicles series at LaMama E.T.C. in May of 2006.

Photo by Steve Susoyev

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SAN FRANCISCO

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Front cover: Bandinelli's "Hercules and Cacus," Florence, Italy;
original photograph and alternative design by James McColley Eilers; rendering by Steve Susoyev;
Hercules's right forearm and fist modeled by Lawrence Kulig.

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I don't agree that there are "shades of truth." We all know the truth, deep inside ourselves. As artists, we have a responsibility to reveal who we truly are, not to work in shades of gray. This truth includes our sexual beings.

Among the many examples of dishonesty in my life is my use of various pseudonyms. I was ashamed of my family name for reasons that might best be explored in therapy. Whatever the reasons, I introduced myself to tricks as Larry Lambert, Jim or Joe. I applied for jobs, and, yes, wrote as "George Bermain" and "G.B. Misa" until I felt free to accept who I am.

George Birimisa

PORTRAITS



George Birimisa in 1956, in New York City.

Photo by Clifford C. Rose

FOREWORD

BY LANNY BAUGNIET

“In the United States, we live at the edge of a civilization that is near the end of the line.”

George Birimisa

AS GENERAL MANAGER of Theatre Rhinoceros, I was in the process of putting together the theater’s fifth season to inaugurate our new, permanent home in the Redstone Building, the former Temple of Labor, located in San Francisco’s Mission District. For the November 1981 opening, I had already chosen Harvey Fierstein’s *Fugue in a Nursery*, the sequel to our tremendously successful production of *The International Stud*, the second play of a work that would come to be known as *Torch Song Trilogy*. I needed another play that would provide adequate momentum to propel us into the new year.

That play proved to be *Pogey Bait*. I had first read the script in *Drummer* magazine, and was intrigued by its possibilities. Set on the U.S.S. Swanson in the North Atlantic during World War II, it provided the stuff of sexual fantasy that appealed to our predominantly gay, male audience. Little did I know until I met the author that the drama was drawn from his own experiences in the U.S. Navy. It was the second of a trilogy of plays based on his life that he had presented in Los Angeles some five years earlier, and had been well received by audiences and critics alike. This was to be the first production of any of his plays in a venue specifically identified as a “gay” theater, although it wasn’t his first San Francisco production—*Daddy Violet* had been presented at the old Committee Theatre on Montgomery Street in North Beach in 1968, and had been greeted with stony silence by its straight, uptight, uptown audiences.

A man of sixty-two, George Birimisa was larger than his own, large life. He was, after all, in training for the physique competition in the Gay Olympics, as the Gay Games were called at that time. “I can get at the truth by becoming autobiographical,” he told me as he sat in my tiny office that doubled as the theater’s box office. Dressed in his dock-worker’s cap, scruffy jeans, and T-shirt, he looked more like a longshoreman than a playwright. “*Pogey Bait* is based on a true incident about me, when I told the captain of my ship I was gay,” he continued. “I had orgies with sailors who might have been heterosexual in other situations.” I was reminded of the experiences of my own father in World War II, as related in his war diary, when sailors were commanded by their superiors to report any same-sex proclivities and activities among their fellow sailors. “I take off in my play from there, into fiction. It’s my play about what a wonderful world it could be.”

I engaged the talented John Wullbrandt to design the set, in the dazzling trompe-l'œil style he had used so effectively and successfully for Doric Wilson's *Forever After*. Carl Carlson, an airline pilot who sat on our board of directors, devised the sound design, leaning a bit too heavily on the soundtrack from Richard Rodger's *Victory at Sea*. "The almost flawless cast," wrote Robert Komanec in his review of the production, "brings Birimisa's powerful play to fruition." But the run of the play was not without its steamy backstage intrigue. The play's director, who will remain nameless here, began dealing cocaine out of the box office during off-hours. He also rented out the theater and its stunning split-level set to a pornographer to produce the all-male triple-X film *The Brig*, with some members of the cast actually moonlighting as porn stars!

Fast-forward twenty-five years. I chanced across a flyer announcing a staged reading of *Viagra Falls*, "a new play by George Birimisa." Out of idle curiosity, I braved the stormy weather and slogged over to the community center where the event was being presented. George did not recognize me, but afterwards I sent him an e-mail offering some comments and suggestions. We struck up an e-mail correspondence, and it wasn't too long after I attended his eighty-third birthday party that George asked me to edit this book of his plays. Thus this project was born.

As I read through his manuscripts, it became abundantly clear to me that all of his plays—with the possible exception of *Mister Jello*—are intensely autobiographical. This was to be not so much a collection of plays as it was to be the story of a playwright, and what a story it is! Born in Depression-era California, George suffered the loss of his father at an early age, followed by abandonment by his mother. He and his two older brothers were consigned to a Catholic orphanage where George discovered his homosexual tendencies. After being reunited briefly with his mother and his younger two sisters, George ran off to join the Navy, struggled for success as a young playwright in New York, and wrestled valiantly to come to terms with his own complex sexuality. The story emerged in bits and pieces from his plays, and I decided to order them in such a way as to tell the story of his life. Of the twenty or so plays that George had written, I chose ten, including the screenplay *The Keupie-Doll Kiss*, adding a handful of his short prose pieces and personal recollections here and there to fill in the gaps.

In various press interviews given over the years, George constantly refers to his unsuccessful and frustrating efforts to write a prose autobiography. Theater critics were confounded by the autobiographical nature of his plays—sometimes resorting to denial that they were anything but fiction—and by his refusal, or perhaps his inability, to write a well-made play. Comparisons to the memory plays of Tennessee Williams were tentatively offered, but his theatrical output was influenced more directly by the politically motivated theater of Bertolt Brecht and Clifford Odets, flavored with the underworld grittiness of Jean Genet. His style is *tranche de vie*, the slice-of-life naturalism popularized by Émile Zola, sometimes tempered with non sequitur elements used by absurdist playwrights such as Edward Albee and Eugène Ionesco.

In *Contemporary Dramatists* (1975), Michael Smith wrote: "Birimisa . . . is a fiercely moral writer; his plays are filled with compassionate rage against needless suffering, furious impatience with the human condition, desperately frustrated idealism. In several plays, the defiant self-hatred of a man rejected by society is embodied in homosexual characters."

George made what can only be called his theatrical début at the tender age of nine. The incident was recounted and captured for posterity in this article from the *San Francisco Examiner* (May 31st, 1933):

2 BOYS HURT AS CANOPY FALLS

The canvas canopy that forms a ceiling for the Civic Auditorium is a dangerous playground for small boys. Two of them learned that yesterday when the canvas gave way and plunged them twenty feet to the cement floor of the north balcony of the auditorium. George Birimisa, 9, who said he lived at Watsonville, received a fractured leg and severe cuts and bruises. But Charles Thornton, 14, of 854 Buchanan Street, his companion, escaped with a bruised hip.

Young Birimisa was taken to Central Emergency Hospital by auditorium attendants. There he said he had been brought to San Francisco with several other youngsters by a man named "Robertson," who came here to attend a Communist meeting held yesterday afternoon in Larkin Hall. He said he met the Thornton boy outside the auditorium and that a climb to the attic of the building and then out on the great canvas canopy was proposed as an exciting diversion. Police were searching for Robertson while the Birimisa boy was receiving treatment.

The Kewpie-Doll Kiss deals with George's childhood during the 1930s, although it does not touch upon this particular incident. Both *Viagra Falls* and *Looking for Mr. America* present an overview of George's entire life, including his childhood, his experiences in the Navy during World War II, his marriage to Nancy Linden, and his relationship with Dr. Marvin Samuels. Although he had dabbled in amateur regional theatricals at various times, it was not until the mid-1960s that George actually studied acting and began to experiment with writing for the stage. His short, early experimental plays went unproduced and unnoticed, by and large, with the exception of *17 Loves and 17 Kisses*, which was dismissed by David Loffert, writing in *Backstage*, as follows: "The main fault of the play is a lack of organic structure, which results in an overall unbelievability. The two characters involved reveal things to one another which almost certainly would have long ago become mutual knowledge, and props have been chosen with a seemingly arbitrary hand. Dialogue and intense feeling do not make a play. Some interesting moments, but not enough . . . Aside to all concerned: are you sure Eugene O'Neill started like this?" Of the other one-act plays from this period, among them *Adrian*, *Big Delectable*, *A Rose and a Baby Ruth*, *Will the Real Yogananda Please Stand Up?*, *There Should Be Flowers* and *It's Your Movie*, only *Degrees* (1966) and *How Come You Don't Dig Chicks?* (1967) are presented in this volume. Gay-themed plays were given little credence or artistic credibility at that time, and the majority of these minor efforts went unread and unproduced.

In the next few years, all of that changed. Mart Crowley's *Boys in the Band* appeared with hella hoopla in New York in January of 1968. Later that year, I chose Crowley's play as my senior directing project at the University of Wisconsin for a workshop production, expecting a student audience of perhaps ten or fifteen people.

Three hundred people showed up, God only knows from out of what closets. Six months later, the Stonewall riots exploded in Greenwich Village. For the first time, gay theater artists all over the country were hit broadside with the possibility of presenting a meaningful representation of their lives on the stage. Within ten years, I had launched Theatre Rhinoceros in San Francisco, and there were comparable burgeoning gay theaters in New York (The Glines), Los Angeles (Apollos's Mice), Minneapolis (Out and About), Denver (Lambda Productions), and Houston (Montrose Players). Similar endeavors were underway in England and Australia. Even more significantly, nearly five hundred "gay plays" had become available for production.

NEW YORK: THE EARLY PLAYS

Having gotten nowhere with his attempts at realistic drama, George determined to "out avant-garde everyone else," and wrote his first viable script, a trifle entitled *Three Violets*, for a play-reading series at Theatre Genesis. When his lead actor dropped out a week before it was to be presented at the legendary Caffe Cino, George took over the role, retitled the play *Daddy Violet* (1967), and added a bit of business for himself that would allow him to calm his nerves by drinking a beer onstage. The total production budget was 15¢ per night, the price of George's can of beer. As a result of a review of this "genuinely strange little play" by Michael Smith in *The Village Voice*, George was invited to perform *Daddy Violet* at a handful of independent regional theaters and universities—among them the Universities of Michigan and Washington and Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. It was also performed at the New Committee Theater in San Francisco. George returned to New York after 102 performances with thirty reviews and \$1,000 in his pocket, the widest exposure and the most money that he had ever had. [Sources: *The Gay & Lesbian Theatrical Legacy*, article by Paul Sagan, University of Michigan Press, 2005; and "The Playwrights' Scene of the Sixties" by Robert Pasolli, writing in *TDR*, Volume 13, No. 1, Autumn 1968.]

Ostensibly an anti-war play, *Daddy Violet* paid homage to George's sisters Easter and Violet while poking fun at the trendy improvisational theatrical abstractions that were popular at the time. Writing in the *Minneapolis Star* (July 15th, 1967), John K. Sherman called *Daddy Violet* "a one-act something, not a play but more than an improvisation . . . a spontaneous mixture of the surrealistic, informal, vulgar, and tender, based on an almost eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation between audience and actors. It may be slight drama, but it is bold and intimate, and lit by a sardonic but not unfriendly grin."

Mister Jello (1968) was saved from oblivion by actor Dan Leach, with whom George was living on and off during this period. Dan retrieved the manuscript from the trash where George had thrown it, and convinced the fledgling playwright that the play was worth salvaging. Initially, the play was divided into two acts and had no songs, although songs by the Junkman and the Carpenter were added for its presentation at La MaMa E.T.C. in 1974. Writing in *Show Business* (March 30th, 1969), Frank Lee Wilde declared the play to be "a prime example of the experimental play that manipulates time, place, and character to illustrate the ambiguity of reality." *Mister Jello* was only a modest success in its productions at La MaMa E.T.C. and the International Theatre Club in London. But it was *Georgie Porgie* (1968) that garnered George both his best reviews and his longest Off-Broadway run (107 performances). That breakthrough production,

played out in comic-opera intrigue involving both the Factory and the Family, also doomed his future in New York.

The critics of the day, unsure how to articulate their discomfort with having been assaulted once again by George's in-your-face approach to the dark side of the homosexual experience, danced daintily around the subject. Lillian Africano, writing in *The Villager* (August 19th, 1971) took the pedantic approach: "There has been an increasing number of plays dealing with homosexual problems in this day of 'liberation' movements . . . What is very real about this play is the strong element of pain and despair. Birimisa is much closer to the truth than writers who cop out on the subject by 'camping' it up." Paul Kelly, writing in the *Advocate* (October 13, 1971), sensed that *Georgie Porgie* had indeed sprung from George's own life: "What George Birimisa has created here—without phony characterizations—are a variety of homosexual experiences that are real—so real that one wonders how much of it is really fiction and how much fact. One senses that much of the play comes from his own personal experiences because it portrays gay life accurately and with no holds barred . . . an extraordinary experience." On the other hand, an outraged and dumbfounded Ernest Albrecht, writing in the *New Brunswick Home News* (August 11th, 1971), saw the play as little more than smut: "*Georgie Porgie* has been called both a 'deeply religious experience' and 'filthy and disgusting.' I suppose those comments only go to prove that religion and filth—like beauty—are in the eye of the beholder. What I saw was something more resembling a dull play than anything else . . . I don't think the play could be called pornographic. Its redeeming quality is that it has no redeeming quality . . . One is inclined to suspect that Birimisa's knowledge of his subject's psychology and motivation is limited to popular pornographic literature."

George took all of this in stride, inasmuch as he could, given the perennial yearning for acceptance that had haunted him since his childhood. These were, after all, publications that enjoyed a limited readership. But Mel Gussow, writing for the *New York Times* (August 11th, 1971) slammed *Georgie Porgie* unmercifully: "If this play is anything, it is a stale series of vignettes . . . This show is obvious and shallow . . . In his final aria, [Georgie] writhes in agony to an apocalyptic [sic] end. The agony is not all his." George was devastated. "Jesus Christ," he ranted. "Which fucking play did he see?"

LOS ANGELES: THE MIDDLE PLAYS

In the mid-1970s, George relocated to Los Angeles, where he presented three plays that came to be seen by his audiences as an autobiographical trilogy, but which he personally viewed as falling short of the promise presaged by his moderate success on the East Coast. The first of these, *A Dress Made of Diamonds* (1976), is "an autobiographical drama set in the period 1932 to 1941," wrote director Ann Bowen in the program notes—roughly the same period covered in George's screenplay *A Keupie-Doll Kiss* and in his unfinished prose autobiography *Sissy*. "It's about a family that has a Tennessee Williams kind of mother. This is a very theatrical piece, suffused with the feeling of the Depression, the relentlessness of misery, and that desperate need to achieve status." This is the period of George's childhood, during which he suffered the rejection of both his biological father and his stepfather, and of his formal education, such as it was, in both parochial and public schools. "Like Tennessee Williams' *Glass Menagerie*," wrote Joseph S. Caruso in *NewsWest* (April 30th, 1976), "the story centers

on the emergence of a young man into adulthood. Unlike Williams' play, Birimisa's study lacks introspection. And while the mood is accomplished, there is an absence of poetry in the writing." Gregg Hunter, in *News-Press* (April 15th, 1976), concurred: "*A Dress Made of Diamonds* is a confused, episodic, and rather turgid drama that takes much too long to focus on its central character. It will take a drastic overhaul to make a viable play of this effort. The best idea would be to toss it in the dust heap." Constantly working to form and reform those sixteen scenes in search of a play, George ended up transforming the stage play into a screenplay, and that latter version of his childhood years has been chosen for inclusion in this volume.

George followed *Diamonds* in short order with *Pogey Bait* (1976), a seafaring story in the tradition of *Billy Budd*, drawn from his wartime experiences as an Apprentice Seaman in the U.S. Navy. Taken from the colorful and salty jargon of the Navy, the term "pogey bait" here refers to candy offered as an enticement for sexual favors, symbolic of the weapons to be used in this struggle for power aboard a World War II destroyer. Sondra Lowell, writing in the *Los Angeles Times* (October 13th, 1976): "Applying current insights to past events can shed new light on them—or it can simply make them look slightly askew. In *Pogey Bait*, author George Birimisa has a homosexual and a black militant team up to outwit the military, psychiatry, and, to a lesser extent, capitalist imperialism. As a play, it works. The triumph of the two young men is, after all, a small one, political only because the militant sailor sees it that way . . . The story is inescapably infused with a new left, new gay consciousness . . . The play is tightly constructed. Following a slow start, the drama develops at a good pace, with relationships smartly interwoven to heighten the intrigue. Birimisa has a fine ear for dialogue." Writing in *Beach People's Easy Reader*, Richard M. Finder was equally enthusiastic: "As a general rule, playwrights should not direct their own material, but there are notable exceptions. Birimisa is such an exception. Like the writing, there is 'economy' in the direction. All movement has purpose, and not a motion is wasted. The play itself is also crafted so that not a line or moment is thrown away." Adding to the praise was Joseph S. Caruso, writing in *NewsWest* (October 15th, 1976): "A play that is so literate and so gut-wrenchingly honest that it renews one's faith in theater as a mirror of real life. As a writer, Birimisa delivers the promise hinted at in his first play, *A Dress Made of Diamonds*, showcased last season . . . With attention to detail, nuance, and individual character development, he makes each moment a cliff-hanger and builds toward a climax that is satisfying and totally believable."

The question was raised over and over again about the backstory of the Captain's relationship with Lefko. Did Lefko have a sexual history with the Captain, or with the Captain's wife? ("The Captain may or may not be overcompensating for having once played 'grabass' with Lefty."—"The Captain is out to get the officer, for reasons that aren't entirely clear."—"Why does the Captain want to get Lefko? This is a little vague, but it seems that Lefko may have had a fling with the Captain's wife.") Although George tells me that he intends this ambiguity, there was this explanation in an early draft of the play that he later removed from the script: "Captain Brucey started as an Apprentice Seaman. His best friend was Chief Petty Officer 'Lefty' Lefko, until one night when they got drunk in a hotel room in Dago [San Diego] and Lefty sodomized him. He now has a vendetta against Lefko." Personally, I prefer to think that Lefty had his way with both the Captain and his wife, and, being the alpha male that he is, has now turned his attention

to Frankie. Sex is, of course, the most powerful weapon being used in this struggle. This ambiguity adds to the sexual tension between these potent fighting men.

With notices such as these, coming at the same time as the proliferation of gay theater companies all over the country, productions of *Pogey Bait* followed in New York, Minneapolis, and San Francisco. The play was well received everywhere it was presented—for the most part. Mike Steele, writing in the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* (September 28th, 1982), had this to say: “The play is George Birimisa’s *Pogey Bait*, one of those works so exceptional in its awfulness that it’s nearly riveting. You don’t dare take your eyes and ears off it for fear of missing Birimisa trumping his last bit of Freudian psychobabble with an even more earnest touch of sociological flatulence. Like the alligator lady in a sleazy sideshow, the play is compelling in its sheer unbelievability . . . With a little energy, they might have come up with a cult show so terrible that it’s truly grand, instead of a tentatively rotten little stinker.”

The third play of his Los Angeles trilogy moved George’s protagonist into the New York of the 1950s. *A Rainbow in the Night* (1978) was eventually to become, after drastic revision, the play presented here—*The Man with Straight Hair*. In its original form, the play drew favorable mixed notices, and fared only about as well in its San Francisco reincarnation at Theatre Rhinoceros some fourteen years later. From a review of *Rainbow* by Walt Westman: “*Gayzette* readers who follow this rag’s contents with the same devotion that a 10-year-old brings to memorizing batting averages will remember the review that appeared in here a year or so ago, reviewing George Birimisa’s play *Pogey Bait*. At that time, I commented on the joy of experiencing a play in which the gayness of the protagonists was taken as given and unobtrusive, and in which serious political themes were raised without exhortation. Birimisa’s new play in the same spirit is a welcome addition to L.A.’s small-theatre scene, and represents substantial growth in the playwright’s considerable skills . . . The play is not so much about its plot as it is an excursion into the feelings of the central characters, and how the communication between them so often comes in a half hour late, or arrives at the wrong station. Anyone sentient in the ’50s will recognize this form of social stupor as the emotional environment they somehow put up with during those years—not unlike the calmness that a pig feels sitting in its mud bath, oblivious to worlds beyond the wallow. I hasten to add that, while the ways the characters related in the play are very ’50s, the play is definitely modern . . . In a recent review in *Footlights* magazine, the playwright is quoted as saying, ‘What I try to deal with in a play is the sub-text, the action, of what people are feeling first. What they say doesn’t necessarily jive.’ It is precisely that tension between the feelings as we perceive them, and the words, words, words that makes *Rainbow* the distressing and exciting play that it is.” Westman was not the only drama critic who noticed the emerging autobiographical episodes as they gave structure to a larger story.

Sondra Lowell, writing in the *Los Angeles Times* (February 17th, 1978): “*A Rainbow in the Night* at the Matrix continues the life of Joey Jurovich, begun in George Birimisa’s *A Dress Made of Diamonds*, and takes up Joey’s story in 1953, when he’s living in New York with his gay lover . . . It’s a mood piece, slow moving, darkly intense, and rewarding in many ways. There could be some tightening, some sense of precision to reassure the audience that the play is indeed written and not partly improvised. But the intimacy established is worthwhile in itself, with flashes of humor that fit in, even

though the laughs sometimes come at surprising moments . . . Where emotion might have been thrust at us in great gulps, it is mostly held back and saved up. The characters themselves are ‘interesting,’ rather than people one takes to one’s heart . . . The effect is that of looking from afar at somebody else’s life. We see every side of these people, and yet something elusive remains to be seen—or felt.”

Thomas Rogers, writing in the *Los Angeles Free Press*, painted an even larger picture: “*A Rainbow in the Night*, currently at the Matrix Theatre, glistens with an intelligence and sensitivity stemming directly from Birimisa’s script. He treads without mishap through a maze of complex relationships and delicate social and psychological nuances. *Rainbow* is Birimisa’s third edition of possibly-autobiographical character Joey Jurovich: in *A Dress Made of Diamonds*, he agonized through adolescence in the ’30s; in *Pogey Bait*, he outmaneuvered the military in the ’40s; in *Rainbow*, Joey is a struggling writer who confronts his own personal confusions in the ’50s. Birimisa’s essential triumph reaches fruition in *Rainbow* with a taste and skill for characterizations and a subtle sensibility and wit that mark the playwright’s growth from an erratically brilliant artist into one who is emotionally responsible.”

Other reviews were also generally flattering. Kelly Hamilton in *Drama-Logue* (February 17th, 1978): “Compared to what usually passes for original drama in Los Angeles these days, *A Rainbow in the Night* stands head and shoulders above the rest.” Jim Ingolio in *The Daily Breeze*: “*A Rainbow in the Night* deserves not a review, but a congratulatory telegram . . . This is not Birimisa’s début in Los Angeles—but without a doubt, *Rainbow* is his most expressive and entertaining work to date. This is an emotionally effervescent show, a play that haunts you like a specter. The reason for the play’s success? Realism.” Cara Lee in *Touch*: “Deeply felt and honest, the sentient and sensitive playwright’s statements are subtle and often humorous . . . Birimisa’s characters often behave whimsically and unpredictably, like people. They talk like people. Birimisa knows how to write dialogue that sounds like natural speech, and how to handle and control accelerating conflict . . . *A Rainbow in the Night* is about growth, and it gives potent evidence of the playwright’s own growth. Birimisa is potentially an important playwright, if not one already.”

Within two years, George had relocated to San Francisco, and didn’t write another play for ten years.

SAN FRANCISCO: THE MATURE PLAYS

George did, however, create a minor sensation with the appearance of *S&M Gym*, a novella of sexual misadventure that was published in serial form by *Drummer*. The nature and value of pornographic literature in respect to *S&M Gym*: his tongue firmly in his cheek, George offers us a send-up of the sort of pornography popular in the ’70s, a hilarious satire of those men who were oh-so-serious about sex, presented here not for its prurient content, which is minimal, but for a portrait of San Francisco as it was then, gone forever now, bulldozed into oblivion by the onslaught of AIDS. It also offers us a glimpse into George’s own life during that period, which was to be explained and expanded in his two late plays, *Looking for Mr. America* (1995) and *Viagra Falls* (2006).

In 1992, at the age of sixty-nine, George returned to the stage of Theatre Rhinoceros in *Without a Net*, a review in two acts, a concept that, except for George’s contribution, didn’t quite realize its goal to present an oral history of gay men and

women of a certain age. *Degrees* of separation abounded. Dean Goodman, who had often written about Theatre Rhinoceros, dedicated his performance in the show to Mark Bortone, who had appeared in *Metaphors* on a double bill with *The Madness of Lady Bright*, Theatre Rhinoceros's inaugural production in 1977. Robert Coffman was a veteran performer with Rhinoceros, his participation in the troupe going all the way back to *The Dear Love of Comrades* at the Goodman Building on Geary Street. Gene Price wrote of the show in *Bay Times*: "George Birimisa's '*Desirable*' was a nicely-structured monologue that recalled his tour of duty in the U.S. Navy during the '40s and how he received an honorable discharge even after confessing that he way gay. Obviously proud of his body, Birimisa later stripped to his jockstrap, struck a few poses, and flexed his muscles to '*Just My Gym*,' and inexplicably turned and wriggled his ass at the audience." Steve Warren, writing in *The Sentinel*: "Finally there's George Birimisa, who shows off his Gay Games gold medal and the body that won it. His tale of navy life during World War II is fully dramatic, and comes closest to what the show should have been—a collection of *Before Stonewall*-type stories from the people who lived them."

George expanded his monologue, presenting it as a solo performance piece called *Looking for Mr. America* at Josie's Cabaret and Juice Joint several years later. Gene Price in *Bay Times* (February 9th, 1995): "This briskly-paced Dickensian odyssey of an orphan's search to find himself sprawls across a continent and fifty years. It follows the character Richie's sexual escapades from teen hustler to grown man, detailing his sexual addiction and discovery that he is HIV positive . . . Birimisa's enactment of the irrepressible Richie from boyhood through middle age is a moving account of man's ability to meet adversity head-on and emerge with an intact sense of self-worth. The treatment is blunt and unvarnished, but the effect is joyous." Dean Goodman in *Drama-Logue* (September 28th, 1994): "Birimisa performs the piece with such sweet innocence that it comes across as an endearing portrait of a lonely man who simply longs for someone to love . . . a rich performance filled with variety and nuance . . . an eloquent and touching portrait of a particular gay man's journey through the last half of the 20th century." Chad Jones in the *Bay Area Reporter* (September 22nd, 1994): "In *Looking for Mr. America*, George Birimisa displays something not often seen in gay solo performance: age . . . Birimisa is a quirky performer, one who walks along the edge of a dangerous precipice: the performance does not seem to be on solid ground, and with one misstep, the whole thing could fall into a chasm of embarrassment for performer and audience alike. Birimisa never oversteps, and indeed, this odd sensation is probably calculated!"

George had finally written his autobiography. All he had to do now was finish it, and the resulting full-length play was *Viagra Falls* (2006), currently enjoying exposure on both coasts. The reviews aren't in yet, but Robert Heide tells me in an e-mail that the recent concert presentation at La MaMa E.T.C. in New York was "riveting from start to finish, tough-minded and right on. It is a play with both ironic humor and heartfelt feelings . . . and will most likely be produced somewhere soon."

"I was a bum," said George in a 1986 interview, "during the '40s and '50s. I hitchhiked all over the country. I was an alcoholic, smoked three packs of cigarettes a day, did drugs. I was another Kerouac. Oh, god. My dear, how I survived I don't know." In the portraits, plays, and perversions that follow, George answers that question. Here is one man's story of growing up gay during the Great Depression, of struggling for

acceptance as both an artist and a man during the years after World War II, of the quest for personal identity during the free-wheeling Sixties, and of pulling it all together as the millennium approached. Ladies and gentlemen, I present—George Birimisa, sinner and saint.

San Francisco
September, 2007



George accepted a 2007 Lambda Literary Foundation Book Award for Theater-Drama in recognition of his work as co-editor of *Return to the Caffe Cino*.

Photo by Valerie A. Kelly
(www.vkellyphotography.com)

DISHING UP GEORGE

by Steve Susoyev

Like many tributes, this one begins with a story about the tribute-giver.

Before George Birimisa and I undertook any other project, my life had to be saved. I met George on April 17, 1997 at a meeting of Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous. Over the previous weekend I had harbored a suicide fantasy because a romantic obsession had gone very badly. This meeting was my last hope.

Later, George would tell me, “When you walked into that room I was afraid of you, because you looked so hard.” This from a man whose own romantic obsessions had moved him, until his 67th year of life, to pay sexually confused young predators to beat the shit out of him. “But then you sat down and started crying, and I realized you were in unbearable pain.”

Shortly after that, I asked George to be my sponsor, and thus began a partnership that continues today. For over ten years, at this writing, George has served as a source of guidance and inspiration, blunt feedback (the only kind worth receiving), and love. He has freely accepted the same gifts from me.

When we launched into the three-year process of compiling the plays and memoirs for our book *Return to the Caffè Cino*, I witnessed human recovery manifest. In his early career, some 45 years ago, George alienated many people through behavior that, he now acknowledges, was motivated by envy. “Other playwrights threatened my self-esteem,” he often says. “I couldn’t see anything worthwhile in anyone else’s work.”

Our book was a showcase of revolutionary work, including George’s, some of which was in danger of falling out of history. For George, the book provided, additionally, a chance to make amends, to honor the work of colleagues he had trashed behind their backs, and sometimes to their faces, four decades earlier. For me, a writer with my own baggage full of sour grapes, George’s growth was profoundly inspiring.

Also inspiring is George’s simple passion about writing. How many eighty-five-year-olds wake up every morning excited about the challenges of the day’s work? Shortly after I met him, I had the opportunity to explain George to someone who had not yet met him:

“He’s in love with a guy 30 years younger than he is, he’s producing his own one-man show, he’s just sent off two plays to theaters back east, and he’s working on a novel and a screenplay.”

Twelve years later, he’s no less busy. If I manage to live as long as George, I hope to be as involved in life and as passionate about creating as he is today. His example will always inspire me.

But beyond the work and creative passion, George is a wonderful specimen of humanity. After a profoundly dysfunctional childhood, marked by extreme poverty and years in an orphanage, he has thrived. He looks for and finds the best in others. He constantly revises his assumptions and opinions. With no formal education beyond the tenth grade, unlike many educated people I know, he never misuses “whom” in order to sound smart. He is vulnerable, still afraid of abandonment, and hungry for validation.

These fears and hungers sometimes get in his way. Decades after his mother’s death, he occasionally sets people up to treat him as she did. He actually told a friend of ours at a dinner party, a man who has given generously to George in countless ways for many years, “I feel abandoned”—when the man said he would be unable to attend George’s 83rd birthday party. This is too much for some people, and they keep their distance, which is sad for him and for them.

He has written the same story dozens of times, in many forms—the story of his mother’s abandonment, his father’s rejection of the little boy whose “sissy ways” embarrassed the tough, angry father. Each time he writes the story in a new form, he gets a bit more of the anger and pain out of his system.

Bring up this season’s Tony award winners, or someone’s favorite off-off-Broadway treasure, and George will find a way to change the subject to *Daddy Violet* or *Looking for Mr. America*. Following parties or dinners where the subject is theatre, people who don’t know him often ask me, “Does George ever talk about anything except his own work?”

Some would see this as evidence of profound narcissism, or at least the behavior of a crashing bore. And yet . . . George leads two weekly writing workshops in which he nurtures dozens of writers, freely praising them when he feels they have achieved something he has not achieved. People learn from being in his presence, and from hearing of his experiences in the theatre and in life.

George Birimisa is still alive and growing. As are his plays and stories.



Steve Susoyev and George Birimisa in 2003.

Photo by James McColley Eilers

MEMORIES THAT BLESS AND BURN

by Caty Cook Powell

In 1954 or '55, anyway in the middle 50s, George entered—or, more like it, catapulted—into my life. I was then a neophyte actor living on the South Side of Chicago and helping to start Compass Players, the first glimmer of an improvisational movement that led later to SNL and Second City. A young and impoverished Elaine May was our teacher, and we developed ideas for performance based on methods she had learned as a child in Viola Spolin's Children's Theatre. Elaine knew charismatic and controversial director Alex Horn from earlier days, so throughout the summer she told us about the doings of some "real" New York actors who had gone to Mexico with Alex planning to work for a year on their craft with no interruption and then create the greatest theatre ever seen. In those days one could live in Mexico forever on a pittance. Of course we all wanted to be there working with the "real artists." However the artists only lasted in Mexico for a few months due to fights or backers backing out, though they reportedly did do some wonderful work. Toward the end of summer one day into our workshop like a tornado blew George with Jerry Cunliffe, both bronzed from the tropical sun, wearing Mexican worker pants and sandals, having hitchhiked, I romantically presumed, all the way from Chichen Itza. Elaine turned the class over to them and they put us through a series of newly developed acting exercises. I was smitten. Turned out that George and Jerry were the vanguard of the Mexico group, now down to a handful but still coming on like an army of conquering heroes. Alex, Anne Raim and Charles Bennett soon arrived and set up a collective, living together, pooling their money for the eventual theatre, working assorted shit jobs and taking just carfare and cigarette money each day. Well of course I had to go and leave the offer of an actual paying job as an actor—what was I thinking?—to go join these nuts.

So the remnants of the artists from Mexico augmented with me began to rehearse a Brecht play, *The Exception and the Rule*. Alas, we never got into production because George and Jerry, tired of the rigors of communal life, or maybe wanting to go out on weekends instead of rehearsing 24/7 when not working or sleeping, left for points East or West. But first we had some memorable rehearsals. As actors in training we spent hours "floating" around the room like a wave, "flying" like a bird, "moulding" through the air as through congealed molasses and working with images following Michael Chekhov, the great Russian actor. Charles was famous for his "turkey." George later put all this work to good use in his first play, *Daddy Violet*. We were big on "preparation," a process of getting into character before going on stage. On one wild occasion I was on stage with Charles and Alex—stage being one end of a room we used to rehearse, the other end being for the director. I was playing the "Widow" in a long courtroom scene

and had just one line at the end of the scene, which meant I got to sit nobly and look blindly into the audience with tears running down my face for the whole scene ha ha while George the Judge, Charles the Merchant who had killed my husband in the play, and Alex the Guide knocked themselves out emoting. This annoyed George no end. George was offstage in the hall, “preparing” as he waited to enter and start the scene with the first line. I was working on the image of “funeral feast,” imagining blood dripping down the walls, and crying. Charles and Alex were also “preparing” on stage. This went on . . . and on . . . and on. Now I’m working on an image of my husband with vultures eating his heart. And on . . . and on. After about an hour and a half, Charles, in character, breaks the excruciating silence with, “What’s taking the judge so damn long?” Uproar. Pandemonium. Total miscommunication: Anne, the Director, hadn’t wanted to interfere with George’s “preparation” and George thought Anne was supposed to cue him when to enter the courtroom. We all collapsed into hysterics and that was the end of rehearsal for that day. Method actors in New York circulated the story to much merriment.

After George and Jerry left, we actors who were going to start the world’s greatest theatre numbered four. Nonetheless because our hearts were pure we figured we had the strengths of ten each, so continued working, rehearsing and saving money. In a few months we found a potential theatre space in a big industrial loft, and who turned up to help us open our theatre but George’s ex-wife, the famous Nancy. With only four of us we had to race around like maniacs to take tickets, run lights, set props and jump on and off stage so Nancy’s arrival was a huge help. She was always willing to do whatever was needed. Perhaps because she looked up to “Creative People”—which, of course she also was, but didn’t seem to know it. She was also the sexiest woman on the planet, as I learned the hard way. We were all living in the same rooming house and one afternoon a tall, good-looking dude moved in. I thought “hmmm.” That night I noticed that Nancy had left her door open as she hung out *en deshabille*, in nightgown. Within twenty-four hours, before I had gotten my act together to even introduce myself to this Adonis, Nancy had become a couple with him. Gay, straight, any man was toast when Nancy made up her mind. And George had been married to this larger-than-life person, this earth goddess. Whoa, Nellie!

Way later, late 60s or early 70s, George and I found ourselves living in a San Francisco commune/collective, both at life transition points, in fact the whole zeitgeist was then transitioning out of the amazing 60s. I had just gotten divorced. George was getting over an eye operation. Pretty much everybody male and female had a big crush on George around this time. He was oozing vitality and piratical charisma, had become a successful playwright and actor, and was flirting with heterosexuality, giving him an interesting ambiguity. I decided that I would lure George into straight life. We went on a couple of movie dates and George was a charming and delightful companion. I was mooning about like a teenager. Alas, some of our housemates cooked up an orgy—two guys, two girls—that was supposed to be super sexy but had the opposite effect of sucking all the romance out of the situation. In retrospect, that may have been the intent of the organizers of the event. Jealous! So no dice with George for me. Nancy you win, you rule.

Later George and I did do one play together that actually went before an audience but probably shouldn’t have. This was in 1965 at the Café Engage in New York, which I

owned with Steve Powell to whom I was married though separated. A lot was going on in our cheap lower East Side neighborhood now called the East Village and not cheap. Artists had been pouring in from the pricey West Village, and taking over old brownstones. Yoko Ono was living upstairs above the café with her then husband and working on amazing pieces. Writers were busy fomenting the *East Village Other*, an early alternative newspaper, at the big round table in the Café's front window. So George and I decided to try another Brecht, since the Engage had a stage. Steve directed this . . . effort. For some insane reason I thought that Steve's issues with me wouldn't affect his directing because we were all artists and adults. Wrong. Rehearsals were pitched battles. Another problem: the third character in the play, *The Jewish Wife*, is an eight-year-old child who turns in her parents, in this case George and me, to the Nazis. Not just any old kid coming onstage bouncing a ball but a part requiring some dramatic flair. We commandeered a friend's daughter who had never been on stage before. What made us think this would work? Actually Debby was pretty good in rehearsal but became speechless as soon as she saw an audience. Perhaps mercifully, I have no memory of any performances so must have been really bad. In cast pictures, George and I glare at each other and look like we are really chewing up the scenery. George has always said that he wrote his first play, "*Daddy Violet*," to recover his self esteem after this fiasco. He recovered all right: "*Daddy Violet*" toured the nation and George has been writing plays ever since. Out of shit grows the rose. George, how about writing a play with a good part for me, old buddy?

Caty Cook Powell
July 25, 2007

NY65 PARTY

by Hadiyah Carlyle

CATY HAS INVITED several friends over. I know some of them. Most of them I don't know. I think they're all from The Foundation, Ned's therapy group. Caty introduces me to one of the guys. His name is George, she tells me, George Bermessa. He's an actor. Caty did theater with him in Chicago.

I had seen George before, in the coffee shop. He's handsome—tall, wavy black hair, blue eyes, strong square chin. He's wearing a clean white T-shirt, and even in the dim candlelight, I see that his biceps and forearms are massive. Even his hands have muscles. He looks like a football player. He acts gay. Very gay. I can hear it in his voice, and see it in the way he moves.

George is friendly and tries to talk to me. He asks me where I'm from, but I can't answer. I can't talk with anyone. I sit off by myself and watch other people talk and smoke joints and cigarettes. Sometimes I get up and take a piece of the cheese that's cut up on the table, or a grape. George keeps staring at me. Sometimes he smiles, sometimes he looks like he's thinking. But I don't want to talk to him, so I don't look back.

Caty calls to me, and everyone else stops talking. "Joan," she says, "Come and sit over here. Let's talk for a minute."

Everyone's watching me. and I'm nervous, but I shuffle over and sit on the stool Caty has dragged to the center of the circle. I'm sitting higher than everybody else. All around me, faces are looking up at me, and Caty starts talking.

"Actually, Joan, this party is for you," she says. "You know, we're kind of concerned about your situation, worried about you. We want to try to help."

All the faces are looking at me, and a feeling of panic tugs at my stomach. I feel a kick in there.

"You have to do something about . . . your condition," Caty says. "The baby."

"What are you going to do?" someone else asks. There's a cloud of smoke in the air from the joint being passed around, and more voices come at me.

"The baby, what about the baby?"

"Joan, you have to be realistic. We all have to be."

Realistic, realistic, realistic, they say.

"You've got to do something, you know."

"Who's going to take care of you?"

"You can't just go on like this. You can't. You've got to do something."

"Yeah, you've got to figure out something to do."

Something, something, something, I hear, but my mind goes blank, and I hate everyone looking at me, and I can't answer when everyone is talking like this. My legs are dangling. The stool is missing its footrest.

Caty again. "Joan, look at me. We want to help. So, we've been talking about it, and . . . well, maybe you should think about getting married."

Married. "No one would ever want to marry someone like you," my mother yells from the bedroom doorway. "Caty must be crazy."

"Think about this," Caty says. "You're going to have a baby. You need a husband. And George here, well, he needs a wife, and wants to be a father, so . . ."

I look at George and his movie-star smile. My stomach twists and flips, and all I can do is stare at him.

"He's agreed to marry you. Right, George?"

George looks back at me. The movie-star smile dims a bit, and George hesitates, then nods.

"Yeah," he says. "I think we could work something out."

"What do you think, Joan?" says Caty.

"George is a good man," someone says.

"Think about it, Joan. This is the best thing."

"Come on, Joan. You've got to do it."

Marry him, marry him, marry him.

Everyone tells me it's the right thing to do, and now they want George to stand next to me. He walks over with a crooked half-smile and hands and arms that ripple with muscles.

"Look, you don't have to answer now, just think about it."

George is next to me, and I know what I want to say, but I can't say it. He's beside me, so close I can smell his body powder and cigarettes on his breath. I slip down from the stool and take a few steps toward the door.

"Just think about it, Joan. Joan?"

I can't stop. I can't slow down. I'm running down the stairs—one flight, then another—and I'm out the door and running down the sidewalk on East 10th. It's long after midnight, and I'm wearing a loose hippie nightgown and no shoes.

"Joan? Joan!"

The voices are behind me, but I can't stop running. Memories are coming at me. Night memories, early morning. The bedroom door creaking open, footsteps, cigarette smell and cologne, hands, the weight. I want to scream but I can't.

I run, and the words are in my head. I want to shout to them: *I don't want to marry him. He doesn't love me. I won't marry someone who doesn't love me.*

The words are in my head, but they don't come out. Instead, I just shout "No!" I run as hard as I can, and shout "No!" as loud as I can.

A hand grabs at my nightgown from behind.

"Joan, Jesus, wait."

It's Larry. Then Caty. She grabs me by the shoulders and shakes me and yells in my face. "Stop it, Joan! For Christ's sake, stop screaming!"

I don't. I'm panting so hard I can barely breathe, but I don't stop shouting. My belly is shaking and vibrating.

A policeman is there, peering into my face. "What's the matter?" he says. "What's going on here?"

I've stopped screaming. I'm standing in the yellow streetlight, shaking. Caty is talking. "She's disturbed," Caty tells the policeman. "She's gonna have a baby, and it's freaking her out. We've got a doctor looking after her, so we just got to get her back to bed."

Caty has me by one arm, and the policeman by the other. They shuffle me down East 10th Street. My feet hurt. Bits of broken glass glitter on the sidewalk.

I'm sitting on the bed, knees up, my arms wrapped around them. I rock back and forth, back and forth, groaning and groaning. It's three in the morning. The party's over. George is gone. Everyone's gone. I hear noises around me, but I don't care. I rock and rock.

Caty is talking on the phone: "She's out of control, what should I do with her?"

Then Ned, the doctor, is standing in the doorway, smiling. He's wearing a pale yellow shirt, and carrying a black medical bag. He walks over in his slow, steady gait, sits on the edge of the bed, takes my hand in one of his hands, and pats it with the other. I like his touch. He tells Caty I'll be okay, and asks her to leave us alone for a few moments. Then he talks to me.

"What's wrong, Joan? Did something upset you?"

I can't answer. I can't even shake my head or look at him. All I can do is stare straight ahead, but I see his eyes, and hear every word he says.

"Hold on, Joan. You're going to be all right. It will take a while, but everything will be all right. You'll just have to hold on."

We sit silent for a while. He's holding both of my hands in his, gently, not binding me. I don't try to take them away. He starts talking again.

"I don't know what happened to you as a child, but there's nothing that you can't get through. I promise. You'll have to do the work, and it will hurt, but if you do the work, your life will be different. Someday, it will all be different."

The work. I have no idea what he's talking about, but he smiles at me, and I let him keep holding my hands.

PORTRAIT OF GEORGE

by James McColley Eilers

IT IS PROBABLY TRUE of most artists, as it is with George Birimisa, that the man—his biography and his evolved personality—is inextricably entwined with his art. It is futile to question why Birimisa the artist is addicted in his work to shock, as that would be an admission that you do not know that he was raised in shock and trained in shock. A man who has lived a hard life from birth until his better years in San Francisco is a man trained to be hard on himself. You can detect his personal history if you read or attend his plays, in which George bares his soul with devastating honesty—a word that is central to the guidance this master craftsman gives to his writing students: “I love what you wrote because it is honest” and “Honesty is the heart of great writing.”

Writers mine their early years for a great deal of their material, and in George’s case that is an endless vein of pain, estrangement, and anger that naturally blended, in early adulthood, into preoccupations with the rituals and world of sado-masochism. The paradox is that the tough guy with the tough experiences has a gentle heart. We all love to recount vignettes of our lives, and, yes, George has an ego and a public personality, but when it comes to serving his students or when he is directing actors, he is selfless: ultimately, he personifies Lewis Carroll’s words: “One of the deep secrets of life is that all that is really worth doing is what we do for others.”

Through long experience, George has an unerring sense, gently delivered, of what material should be cut or expanded—conflict, action, props, character development, etc. Even the modest few who do not come to George with the desire to be professional writers are changed; they discover that they are exceptional. George teaches them how to tell the story of their lives; they shine with the special light that every life deserves, and they “realize” themselves, for George is a true educator (in the sense of “leading forth”).

This will all sound rather boring to anyone who knows George personally, for George in person is entertaining, ever-unfolding, never static, awakening new insights in others as he continues his own process of self-discovery. In one decade I may accuse George of being a “walking Christmas tree” as he falls in love with long, flashy earrings and prefers to wear the gaudy, wildly patterned “white trash” wardrobe you might buy at Kmart or find at a Goodwill store. Soon thereafter, he is wearing various folk headgears. Time passes, and he tires of big earrings as he dons the tasteful wardrobe given to him by friends and fans.

What George will never be is an “invisible old man.”

But how long will the physical assaults of aging bounce off George? Seemingly forever! “You don’t play *The Patient* very well, George,” I said to him during one of his stays in a hospital bed. How can I play *The Concerned Friend* when George will ever refuse to languish and be pathetic? On his way to a Labor Day weekend excursion, carrying heavy bags up a steep San Francisco hill, George dropped in at a hospital to

follow up on some test results. The tests revealed that George had had a heart attack. George's holiday bags went into a cupboard as he was checked into the hospital for an angioplasty; then it was to be a triple bypass; and finally, in fact, it was a quadruple bypass.

But George Birimisa has the fortitude of an ox! In addition to his indomitable will, his years as a prize-winning bodybuilder in the Senior Class at the Gay Games gave him a strong body. The young woman doctor attending him said, "George is in better shape than anyone else on this floor." When George is in the hospital, no matter how serious his condition, his hospital room becomes crowded with chatting friends, and he reigns like a Hollywood star, talking on the phone or in conversation with his visitors.

I cannot trust my knowledge of George. Twenty years ago, I felt that George, frank about early periods of sex addiction and a preoccupation with sado-masochism, was not so free of it as he thought. As he expressed his happiness about having escaped it, he seemed to want to control it, as in some master-slave mentality.

For a while I tried to write more and more horrific stories, trying to shock the shock master (exploring my own dark side?), but I dropped that self-conscious exploration when George chided that I was not being myself. I am sure that every student of George's feels he is being personally challenged and will engage in some personal duel with George that helps give birth to the work. Meanwhile George, too, is changing all the time, learning how to love himself, with the gentle George taking the place of the man haunted by a cruel father, a vacant-minded mother who "misplaced" him, scattered siblings, life in an orphanage, and life on the road.

How has George annoyed me? At one point, feeling George had a simplistic reaction to some political event, I thought, "George is a knee-jerk radical!" The examined person is never perfect, and neither is the person examining him, but once you get past the everyday facts or the myth projected onto George, you find yourself in the best place—the creative world of George's writing group or storyteller group, or in one of his plays, and you forget trivial differences.

With his many surgeries and physical trials in recent years, George needs no more pain. He remains a wild man, but only in Isadora Duncan's sense ("Don't let them tame you!")—a wild man who happily embraces ethical principles and sane behavior, with the conscientious unlearning of old ways, and self-training in new ways.

If all of us artists feel our true self is the part that creates the art, then George the playwright is controlled, not controlling. He is controlled by all he has learned about theater and his obedience to its laws, which he knows so thoroughly. He has confronted the historical demons in his personal psychic journey, and, through the process of writing and teaching and friendship, has chained up his monsters at the door and moved into the house of love.

GEORGE AS I KNEW HIM

by Jim Carrozo

IN THE MID-'80S, my life-partner, Rick Granat, one of George Birimisa's oldest friends, was diagnosed with AIDS. As we passed the time waiting for his transition, we would often reminisce about the '60s, and inevitably George's name would come up. One day I said rather gravely that I thought George Birimisa was a psychologically manipulative, button-pushing catalyst with a penchant for two-bit psychoanalysis and a laugh just short of a drag queen's cackle. Rick roared with laughter: "Those are the very things I love about George," he said. He was right, of course, and I have long since changed my opinion, but in 1968 I saw him as a spoiler.

To me George was the kibbles and bits in life's bowl of cherries—good roughage, but hard to digest. Politically, socially, spiritually, or intellectually, he was equally offensive to all belief systems. Conservatives would literally blanch and gape in his presence, and if you seriously considered yourself to be a liberal, you'd better *really mean it* because George carried *that* banner all the way to the level of social anarchy. He was also a fine debater, but was not beneath the shameless use of red herrings to derail anyone getting close to a win.

One night the three of us were at Arby's and, as usual, George and I were arguing over something as we dined. I was gesturing with my knife as I spoke, and I must have momentarily taken the lead in the debate because he quickly injected one of his psychobabble observations. He said, in that really irritating, laid-back, calmly analytical tone of his, "Look at you, Jim. I can't take anything you say seriously, because you're obviously unconsciously acting out your hostility toward me with that knife."

Boy, did I take the bait big-time. I became so unhinged that I stormed out of the restaurant in a huff, bellowing that the only significance of the knife was that it was held by an Italian with a genetic predisposition for hand-gesturing, and that it should *not* be confused with "the urge to kill," which was an entirely different matter. The dramatic impact of the moment was ruined a minute later when I had to sheepishly return to pay my bill. George knew where my buttons were and when to push them.

The almost daily use of psychedelics must have affected the way I processed that entire era, because most of my recollections have a unique, cartoonish quality to them. One such wacky snapshot of George stands out as an example of how I perceived him on acid.

It was a Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies morning, and after a long night of acid-fueled bonding with Rick, he and I decided to go downtown, where I would get the same tattoo that both he and George had: a beautiful black panther. George viewed the plan with grave, almost dire, misgivings having to do with the emotional link between

his tattoo and a chaotic relationship that he formerly had with a man I knew only as “The Mad Doctor,” the progenitor of the panther legacy. Apparently, one day, long before all this, “The Mad Doctor” tied George to a chair. An innocent enough afternoon dalliance—except he then went away for the weekend, leaving George tied up until the following Monday. I tried to understand George’s concern, but I really wanted that tattoo, and I was tripping far too heavily to confront the maze of implications it presented. What I *do* remember quite vividly was the way things *looked* in my altered state.

As Rick told him of our plan, George’s face grew dark. Then it began to morph and melt and reshape itself until it resembled a character from the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers comics, all primary colors and oversized digits and, in this case, sporting a giant nose. I must tell you here that George had this unreachable itch on a nerve ending somewhere up inside his nose. He was always poking around in his nostril with a toothpick, trying to locate and relieve this itch.

On this Technicolor morning, the ritual had gained my rapt attention. I could not take my eyes off the interaction between the invading toothpick, which was also gigantic, and the huge but defenseless nostril, twitching and scrunching as if to get out of the way, to avoid detection or injury. As the penetration process unfolded, the toothpick kept changing shape, now an ice pick, now a dildo, now a giant redwood, and as it did, so too the nostril grew until it looked like an enormous black hole sucking all phallic symbols into its darkness. Over all of this was George’s stressed and troubled voice ruefully exclaiming, “Oh, that’s just perfect! Yeah, you do that, Jim! You run and get that tattoo. Forge that chain!”

The last image in my mind as we drove off was of George standing in the doorway, relentlessly stabbing at his nose like some quixotic knight errant attacking an imaginary dragon with a rusty old sword, all the while enjoining us to “follow that sadistic chain all the way to the end.” I’m sure the acid made the whole thing far more grotesque than it actually was.

But I think George’s favorite role was that of iconoclast. He seemed to relish those wide-eyed folks seeking spiritual enlightenment. With the ease of a Klansman on “The Jerry Springer Show,” he could transform a living room full of quiet, new-age apostles into a pack of disagreeable, snarling primates. One night a group of such aspirants sat around a long coffee table, in the center of which was a large, hard-bound edition of a book by theosophist Alice Bailey. The title, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, may serve to describe the gravitas with which these folks had invested themselves. They wore their best “*Nam myoho renge kyo*” smiles, and they had come with a pilgrim’s heart to drink from the eternal fountain of Eastern Thought.

Previously, each had been asked to read the same specific passage from the book, and then write down on little pieces of paper a word or a phrase to describe the impact of what they had read. There were lots of “oohs” and “ahhs” as the moderator opened each little piece of paper and read aloud the contents. “Illuminating,” said one, accompanied by little cooing sounds of approval. “Soul-satisfying,” read another. “Life-changing,” said still a third, and on and on around the table, each one meeting with everyone’s shared appreciation. And then the moderator opened George’s little piece of paper.

His face paled and, as his jaw slackened, he emitted a tiny, barely audible gagging sound as the paper floated down to the table. The bold, hand-printed words seemed to leap from the page and scream their message to the assembled seekers: “Fuck Alice Bailey!” The phrase hung in the air as if it had actually been uttered; as if it had form and posed a physical threat. The collective gasp of the disciples was palpable, and, as their serene demeanor began to disintegrate and then reassemble into outrage, it was as if their tongues had been confounded. They began to babble, vilifying the messenger and misunderstanding his invitation to “Lighten up!” Then I heard, above the fray, George’s slightly maniacal laughter echoing through the house and out into the night.

There were many such insights that drew us together. Yes, George was opinionated, intractable, and argumentative; yes, he could sometimes be suspicious and paranoid, even divisive. What makes him different is that he has earned and taken ownership of all that he was and is, both the positive and the negative. He is *authentic*.

That being said, please understand that my past statements about him being full of shit were usually made while standing knee-deep in my own excrement, so when he offered me the opportunity to do a no-holds-barred portrait of the man as I knew him forty years ago, I knew there would be an enormous difference in my perception of him then and now. But one thing is unchanged. George Birimisa is still a man to be reckoned with; a flawed genius possessed of a literary sparkle and armed with an incisive wit capable of making people laugh, cry, think, and hopefully learn, all the while not really caring one way or the other. He does his art. What you do is your business.

Over the years, he has influenced my thinking in more ways than I can count. His opinions on everything from child-rearing to dialectic materialism have stayed with me over time, and I’ve often told stories about him, showing his humor and humanity. Of course, they were, like the ones related here, mere anecdotes, and no truly valued person should be reduced to that. His is a remarkable history, worthy of a good biographer.

We went our separate ways in the ‘70s, and then in the ‘80s, in the midst of the AIDS crisis, we were reunited at Rick’s bedside. The fact that George took a hippie bus all the way from San Francisco to be here spoke volumes of his loyalty and concern for both of us. After Rick passed away, we lost touch again, but now, like so many, we have re-grouped on the information superhighway.

One final note on George’s laugh, which has been used in this piece as a literary device. Those who know George know another, more familiar laugh. It is a sweeter-sounding, softer laugh that has in it a kind of longing; an ironic acceptance of the pickle we’re all in. It reveals a gentleness and a vulnerability underneath all the disappointment and pain of what we who know him realize was an intolerable childhood.

Okay, is that it? Should Porky Pig pop up now with his famous exit line, “Th-th-th-that’s all, folks”?

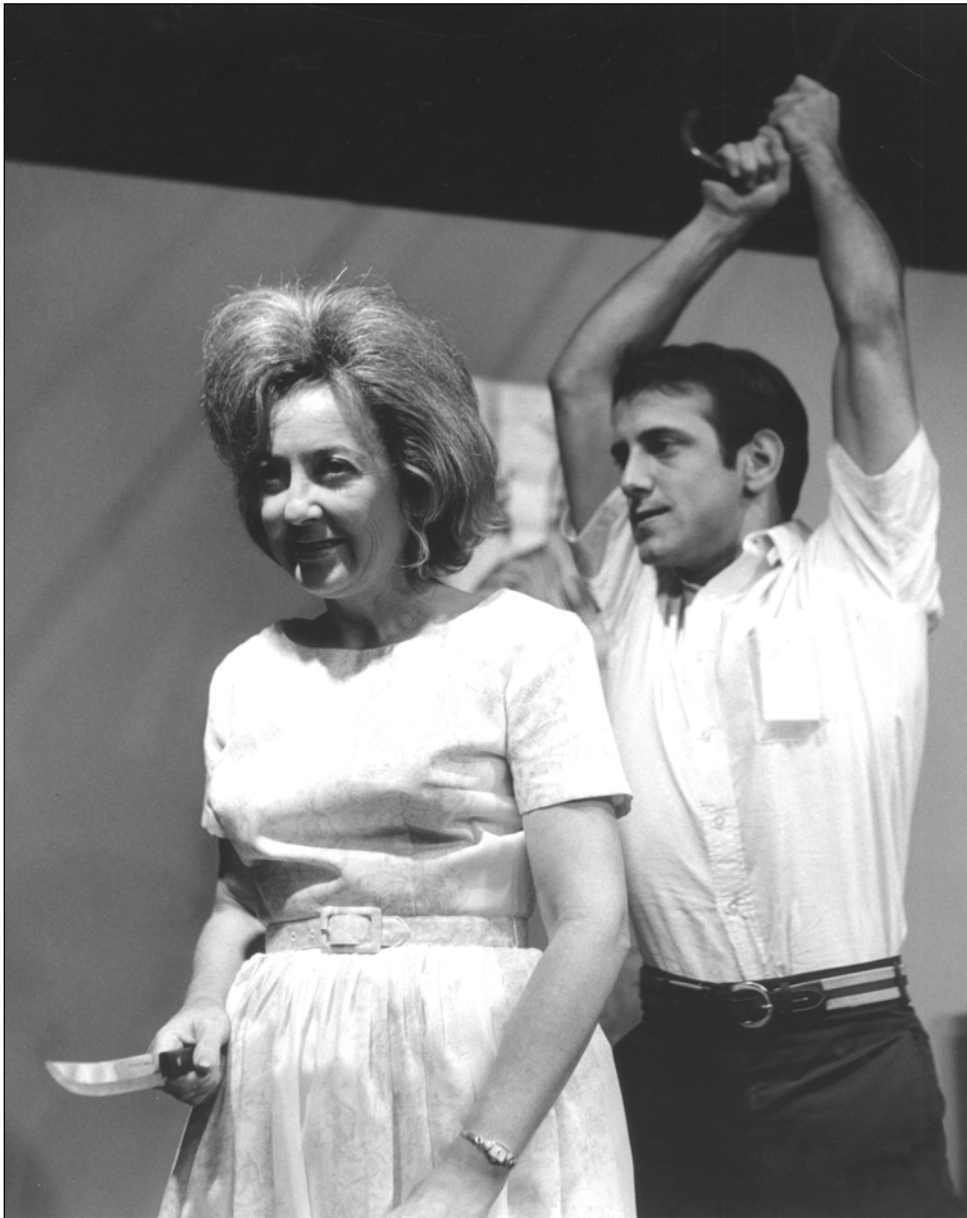
I don’t think so! That would mean there’s no more to come. I’m sure George would be better served by Bugs Bunny and his iconic invitation to the ever-present “now”: “Eh, what’s up, Doc?”

TEN PLAYS



Claude Barbazon as Georgie and Dan Leach as Rufus in the première 1968 production of *Georgie Porgie* at Eugenia's Cooper Square Arts Theatre.

Photo by Avery Willard



Nita Ramsay and Richard Granat opened *17 Loves and 17 Kisses* at the Playwrights Workshop Club in Manhattan in 1966. George says, "It's not one of my top ten—just an early attempt at killing my mother through an alter ego character, so I don't want it in the anthology—but it's the first of my plays to be photographed."

Photographer unknown

DEGREES

1966

Degrees was first produced on stage at Theater Genesis in New York in February of 1980. Station WBAI (listener-sponsored radio) in New York City had broadcast the play complete and uncut in 1966 despite its very gay content, a first for radio in America.

CHARACTERS:

ROBERT, 31

SHEILA, 20

LOUIE, 27

THE TIME: 1966.

THE SET:

An apartment on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Center stage is the living room. Upstage left is a small platform with a bed on it. Stage right is the exit to the bathroom. Stage left is the suggestion of a kitchen. Upstage center is a couch that dominates the room. Television set is downstage left with its back to the audience. Overall effect is middle-class chic.

However, the living room is a total mess. The coffee table is loaded with empty beer cans, medical books, empty cigarette packs, etc. *Muscleboy* (a gay muscle magazine) and other muscle magazines are scattered on the floor.

(As the play begins, the stage is dim. ROBERT enters upstage right. He is very solid looking, almost stolid. He is well dressed, and is carrying a Samsonite suitcase and an attaché case. He trips over a chair and falls flat on his face.)

ROBERT: Why didn't he fix the hall light? You'd—damn it! The miserable little bastard! What's he trying to do to me? (Gropes his way to a lamp and switches it on. Stares in disbelief at the messed-up room. The phone rings. Picks up the receiver.) Hello? No, Miss—I'm sorry, he is not here! I don't know when he'll be back—What? (Very angry.) I said—I don't know! (Slams down the receiver, sits on sofa, then jumps up and grabs the phonograph record that he just sat on. Stares at it, shaking his head. Throws record across room, pushes clothes to other end of couch, and sits.) I felt it in my bones. The slob—the filthy slob. Worse than a pig! (The phone rings. Waits until it has rung three times, then picks it up.) Hello? Miss, I told you he's not here! Yes, uh—of course! (Smiles.) If you want to pick up the record, it's okay with me. I must say—I can't guarantee its condition. Yes, Miss! I'll be here! (Hangs up.)

(ROBERT picks up the record and stares at it. It is broken. Starts to look for album cover but gives up. Goes back to sofa and places record next to him. Takes out gold cigarette case and carefully puts cigarette into gold cigarette holder. Looks for ashtray, finally finds a full one under a pile of clothes. Empties ashtray into an overflowing wastebasket and sits back.)

ROBERT: (Speaks as if LOUIE were in the room with him.) I just don't know anymore, Louie. You yack about Sartre, Kesey, Brecht, and the Supremes. Creativity and existential psychotherapy and you destroy everything beautiful. Vietnam and gasoline jelly and Johnson is the new Hitler and Paul Six is fulfilling his function as the Prince of Peace. (Pours himself a drink from upstage bar.) When you moved in with me you had a tin suitcase, three pairs of jockey shorts, and the collected works of Mao Tse-Tung. I can't help but ask a very simple question that is square and old-fashioned. Maybe it's Buckley-oriented—maybe it's Goldwater-right and not involved with the world crisis. (He moves stage left to end table. Takes a pair of shorts that is covering a hand-carved, nine-inch tiger's-eye Oriental statuette. Throws shorts on floor and picks up statue, checking it for scratches.) You speak of beauty—of creativity, and look at your friends, Louie! They live in ugly holes with grey-yellow walls and filth all around them. How can they believe in beauty, in a better world? How can you believe in beauty? (Replaces statuette, goes back to liquor cabinet and pours another drink.) Answer me, Louie! (Waits for answer.) Somehow, stinking armpits and filthy apartments are connected with Tom Paine, civil liberties, S.N.C.C., and the S.D.S., and you're a square unless you're a C.O. And, yes, capitalism and democracy don't necessarily go hand in hand, and you are writing the novel. I can just hear you!

LOUIE: (Voice on tape.) I'm sorry, Bobby—I didn't know the place was a mess—I mean, I was going to clean it up. I've been so damned busy—you know, working on the novel—I just didn't notice. And, hell—I'm not middle-class—

ROBERT: What do you answer when you get "middle-class" thrown at you twenty-four hours a day?

LOUIE: (Voice on tape.) What do you want me to do, huh? Objects aren't that important. That's what's wrong with our society—we're all involved with objects. I mean, we have the fuzz to protect objects. That's their function. Bobby, if an object is stolen, it's boom-boom, the fuzz right there, hip-happy. Private property is sacred. It's our middle-class orientation. The fuzz are part of the status quo. It's that simple.

ROBERT: (Leaning against the liquor cabinet.) Is it, Louis? Do you really think it's that simple? (Lights cigarette, then empties overflowing ashtray into wastebasket.) Sure, I admit I was fascinated at first—like how you were brought up in the streets on the north side of Pittsburgh. How you sold papers all night and gave the money to your aunt after your father died. And the story you told me about your father. I felt sorry for you, Louie. You're clever that way, and I'll never forget that story.

LOUIE: (Voice on tape.) Dad was giving a speech in the park next to Lake Elizabeth. I was eight years old. He'd joined the Communist Party about six months after

he'd been laid off from the Clark Bar factory. There weren't many people listening—about ten or fifteen—and I don't know why the fire department turned on the hoses, but they did. They threw Daddy in jail. He was sopping wet and it was winter, but he gave his bunk to an old man who was so ancient he'd been a Wobbly, and Dad slept on the concrete floor. Well, Bobby, he caught pneumonia. It took him about a month to die!

ROBERT: Yes, I remember all your stories—all your underground stories you said would never get into the history books, like the way your dad taught you that John Reed was buried in the Kremlin. And now—you're going to write the great political novel. What a laugh! (Laughs out loud.) "*J'accuse!*" (Pause.) Louie, if you really cared—cared for anything or anyone—if you cared for me—you'd clean up this place. You want to change the world! Ha! Pigs of the world unite! (Picks up a dirty T-shirt.) White pigs. (Picks up a yellow T-shirt.) Yellow pigs, black pigs, and guinea pigs. You have nothing to lose but your filth! Yes, we must stand together against the corrupt system. Fifty million corrupt armpits. Raise both hands, please, that ought to stink out the middle-class reactionaries. Biological warfare—(The doorbell rings—a long, insistent ring.) Yes, just a second, Miss!

(ROBERT gets record from couch, then starts looking for the album cover in the mess. SHEILA comes skipping in the front door. Her hair is in pigtails. She wears a miniskirt and black boots, and textured stockings that match the skirt. She is right behind ROBERT and peeks at him, smiling and giggling.)

ROBERT: (Jumps back.) I, uh—I didn't see you—

SHEILA: (Holds out her hand.) Hello, I'm Sheila!

ROBERT: (Holds out record.) Here's your record, Miss. I'm sorry, but—

SHEILA: Where's the cover?

ROBERT: I'm afraid I don't know. I just got back into the city, Miss, and I—

SHEILA: Sheila, silly!

ROBERT: I beg your pardon?

(ROBERT picks up a stack of clothes and moves away from her. She follows him around the room.)

SHEILA: Not "Miss." My name is Sheila. S-H-E-I-L-A. Sheila. (Pause.) I really do love the album cover. It's got a poem on it!

ROBERT: I'm sorry, but you'll have to talk to Louie about it.

SHEILA: I don't think you understand, Bobby. I want the album now. I just have to have it. You just don't want to understand, do you? It must be around here somewhere. Uh—why isn't Louie here?

ROBERT: I haven't the faintest idea.

(SHEILA begins looking under clothes on table. She picks up a Muscleboy magazine and starts to thumb through it, starts giggling. ROBERT takes it away from her, then picks up all the other magazines and puts them on a shelf away from her.)

SHEILA: I'm absolutely positive it's here somewhere. After all, it's only logical. If the record is here, the album must be here—right, Bobby?

ROBERT: Look, Miss—uh—Sheila—I just got in and the place is a mess. Why don't you call Louie later?

SHEILA: Don't be a sil. If you don't want me to look around, I won't! (Kicks off her boots and jumps up on sofa, walking back and forth in her bare feet, jumping up and down.) I understand, Bobby, I really do. (An awkward pause. ROBERT piles clothes into a huge pile center stage.) Nice!

ROBERT: I beg your pardon?

SHEILA: How many rooms?

ROBERT: Three.

SHEILA: Large. I wish I had an apartment like this. Do you have a cig?

ROBERT: What?

SHEILA: (Helping herself from cigarette box on coffee table.) Match?

(ROBERT takes out lighter from pocket. SHEILA is kneeling on couch, staring boldly at him. Gets a light from ROBERT, holding his hand with both her hands.

ROBERT pulls his hand away.)

ROBERT: I'm sorry about how the place looks. Uh—the album cover must be here, uh—somewhere!

(ROBERT starts looking for album cover on the far side of the room. SHEILA jumps off the couch and follows right behind him.)

SHEILA: I'll bet you're glad to be back, Bobby. I once took a bus up to Boston. One look was enough to turn my blood to ice water. I grabbed the next bus back. Creepy and ghoulish. I read a book once about little old ladies from Boston. They wore nineteenth-century hats and sipped tea in cafeterias. I didn't believe it until I saw it with my own eyes!

ROBERT: Louie's been talking about me?

SHEILA: It's none of your beeswax.

ROBERT: (Smiling for the first time.) I haven't heard that expression since I was a kid. Is it my accent?

SHEILA: None of your beeswax.

(ROBERT finds album cover under cushion on the sofa.)

ROBERT: Bessie Smith, right?

SHEILA: Oh, how wonderful! Thank you, Bobby!

ROBERT: (Uptight.) My name is Robert Ginsberg.

SHEILA: (Giggles.) You want me to call you Doctor Ginsberg? All right—thank you, Dr. Ginsberg.

ROBERT: Robert. I don't like "Bobby."

SHEILA: Your wish is my command, Robert. Can I ask you a question?

ROBERT: Have one on me.

SHEILA: Why are you such a grump-nose? Is it because you're so old?

ROBERT: Uh, you're—I'm twenty-nine. A person has to become twenty-nine sooner or later.

SHEILA: I wasn't talking about your age. But I must say—you are cute!

(SHEILA moves towards him. ROBERT moves towards kitchen.)

ROBERT: Would you like a cup of coffee?

SHEILA: Oh, how sweet of you! Yes, I would.

ROBERT: Cream and sugar?

SHEILA: Black, please.

(As soon as ROBERT exits to kitchen, SHEILA skips over to where he has put the Muscleboy magazines, picks one up, and begins to look through it. She tries flexing her biceps and looks at it—giggles and makes a face. ROBERT enters with coffee, coughs, puts coffee on the table, then gets TV Guide and sits on the sofa. SHEILA picks up cup of coffee, takes a sip.)

SHEILA: Ugh! (Waits for a response from ROBERT, but he is absorbed in the TV Guide. Moves closer to him, almost putting her breasts in his face.) I don't mean to disturb you, but to be perfectly honest about it, Doctor, I really, uh—don't like coffee, black or otherwise. I drink it because—well—it's grown-up, you know. Could I have a glass of milk, please? And—do you have any cookies?

ROBERT: Hmmm. There's a good show on at nine.

SHEILA: (Confronting him.) You're nasty and selfish! You didn't hear a word I said.

ROBERT: What?

SHEILA: That's better. You have very sexy eyes—did you know that?

ROBERT: No.

SHEILA: You really do. Smoldering, like Valentino's. I saw him in *The Sheik* at the Museum of Modern Art. You should look at people more.

ROBERT: Would you please—?

SHEILA: What I said before was that I really don't like coffee—black or otherwise. Could I have a glass of milk? Do you have any cookies?

ROBERT: (Takes her cup.) I don't know about you—you're like a—

SHEILA: Like a what?

ROBERT: Uh—never mind. (Quickly exits into kitchen.)

SHEILA: (Shouting after him.) I'm always interested in what people have to say about me. (Pause.) Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me! (Walks around room, speaking with fear and terror to herself.) If only I cared—just a little bit. What am I playing? Hopscotch? Jacks, or Take a Giant Step? Mother May I? Oh, Louie, I wanted to care. I wanted to find out what it was like. Do people care? Really? Oh, Louie, I'm sorry for you, I really am. Why? Why, Louie?

(ROBERT enters with large glass of milk, napkin, and cookies on saucer.)

ROBERT: Here!

(ROBERT places milk and cookies on table. SHEILA sits down. ROBERT places napkin on her lap.)

SHEILA: (Giggling hysterically.) Goody! Goody! Chocolate chip. I just love chocolate-chip cookies! (Dips cookie in milk.) Mmmmm! Scrumptious! Mmmmm!

(ROBERT goes to bar and fixes himself a drink.)

ROBERT: It doesn't look like Louie is coming, does it?

SHEILA: You want me to go?

ROBERT: I didn't say that. How old are you?

SHEILA: Twelve! (On the verge of tears.) Poor, poor Louie.

ROBERT: What did you say?

SHEILA: (Shouting.) Poor Louie!

ROBERT: What are you talking about?

SHEILA: (Deadly serious.) Go on! Hide, hide, hide from half the human race!

Nobody really cares! I guess I don't care! So there!

ROBERT: What on earth are you talking about?

SHEILA: (Crying.) Nothing. That's the whole point. I'm not talking about nothing, and I don't want nothing! Nobody does. Why don't you relax and read your magazine? (Gets up from sofa and quickly puts on her boots and coat, grabs her purse and record album.) So put that in your smug pipe and smoke it, Doctor Ginsberg!

ROBERT: Why don't you just come out and say it—what do you want?

SHEILA: (Moves close to him.) I could! You know that, don't you?

ROBERT: Could what?

SHEILA: If I cared—if anyone cared for anything or anyone. I could go ahead and try—at least not give up—not surrender. But that's an intellectual question, isn't it? (Pause.) I knew it wouldn't be easy.

(SHEILA takes the record from the album and drops it on the floor. Holding the album close against her, she exits. ROBERT goes over, picks up the record, and looks at it.)

ROBERT: Huh—it's broken! (Goes to bar and fixes drink, then picks up empty beer cans from coffee table and takes them into kitchen. Picks books up from floor, stops.) If anyone cared for anything or anyone. (Bends over and picks up more stuff.)

(LOUIE enters. He needs a haircut, and he is wearing a black patch over his right eye. Does not expect to see ROBERT.)

LOUIE: Bobby! Uh—goddam! Hiya. (No answer.) Hiya, Bobby!

ROBERT: (Mumbles.) Hello.

LOUIE: Well, how are you?

ROBERT: Okay. (Takes glasses into kitchen.)

LOUIE: (As he loads his arms with clothes.) You just get in, huh? (No answer.) Did you just get in, Bobby?

ROBERT: Yes, I just got in!

LOUIE: I wish you'd've called or something. I've been at the library all day—doing research. I knocked off another chapter. Really getting there. Would you like to read it?

ROBERT: (From kitchen.) Some kid was here to see you.

LOUIE: Didn't you just get here?

ROBERT: Half an hour ago.

LOUIE: Boy or girl?

ROBERT: Who knows? Came to pick up a record she lent you.

LOUIE: Sheila?

ROBERT: I don't remember her name.

LOUIE: Did you give it to her?

ROBERT: It's in the trash. It was on the sofa under some clothes, and I sat on it.

LOUIE: Gee! I'll just have to buy her a new one—you know?

ROBERT: What are you going to use for money?

LOUIE: What? (No answer.) Well—if I have to, I'll go back to work. (Pause.) Bobby, I—uh—I didn't—

ROBERT: What are you trying to say?

LOUIE: I guess I better dump this crap in the dirty laundry. Why don't you sit down and relax? I'll take all this stuff to the Laundromat first thing in the morning. Sit down. I'll clean it up!

(ROBERT picks up suitcase and starts to exit. LOUIE tries to take suitcase from ROBERT but slips and falls to floor, still holding clothes in his arms.)

ROBERT: I am relaxed. (Exits.)

LOUIE: (Shouting.) Was the traffic heavy? (No answer.) You want me to fix you a nice drink? (Stands, holding the clothes.) Maybe I should get a job!

(LOUIE moves to wastebasket, takes out record, and slowly moves downstage, staring at the record, still with clothes in his arms.)

LOUIE: (To himself.) Yeah, Sheila, dear. Like hell I'll buy you another record. Playing your little games—your little-girl games. What in hell did you say to him, huh, Sheila? What?

(Quick blackout. Voices in darkness.)

SHEILA: Lou-ie? Lou-ie? (Pause.) Where are you, Louie? Louie?

LOUIE: I'm taking an invigorating B.M.

SHEILA: (Shouting.) I can't hear you!

LOUIE: I'm taking a shit and reading the magazine section of the *Times*, if you must know. I'll be out in a minute.

SHEILA: It's dark in here!

LOUIE: Okay, I'm coming!

SHEILA: Will you please hurry up?

LOUIE: You damned girls are all alike—never satisfied!

(LOUIE enters in the dark, stripped down to his shorts. He curses when he bumps into a chair and knocks it over. Turns on a lamp that is over the bed. The lights illuminate the bedroom area, and the rest of the apartment is in darkness.

LOUIE stands on the bed. Looks down at SHEILA.)

LOUIE: Shit, I can't take a relaxed shit!

SHEILA: What did you say?

LOUIE: (Tickling her.) You damned women are never satisfied.

SHEILA: Second thoughts, huh?

LOUIE: It was your idea to switch off the lights. I like to see what I'm doing. (SHEILA throws pillow at him.) How's my little Catholic? Going to confession tomorrow? (Throws pillow back at her.)

SHEILA: Do you always get vicious right after? (Pause.) You can't expect emancipation overnight!

(LOUIE takes bedspread and drapes it around himself. Parades around the room. Stops in front of mirror, drops bedspread. Poses in front of mirror, making a muscle.)

SHEILA: (Giggles.) It's a shame.

LOUIE: What's that supposed to mean?

SHEILA: Forget it, Louie!

LOUIE: You want me to put on my pants?

SHEILA: I don't know. I like the dimples on your knees.

LOUIE: It's acne!

SHEILA: Oh! (Sits up in bed.) It wasn't very good!

LOUIE: What wasn't?

SHEILA: Never mind.

LOUIE: You're confusing as hell. I thought we hit it off damned good!

(SHEILA gets out of bed and gets textured stockings from chair in living room. Sits in chair. Picks up pack of cigarettes from floor—it is empty. Throws it down.)

SHEILA: Gimme a cigarette.

(LOUIE gets pack of cigarettes and holds them out to her. She starts to take one but he pulls them away, teasing her. He jumps up and down on bed. She ignores him, and starts to put on the stockings. He moves to her, puts cigarette in her mouth, and lights it.)

LOUIE: Going somewhere?

SHEILA: I'm getting dressed. (Stands up.) What's with you?

LOUIE: What's with you?

SHEILA: You are not very sensitive!

LOUIE: You want gypsy violins?

SHEILA: You don't know, do you? Why do you hide behind cheap vulgarity? Where are you?

LOUIE: In this room.

SHEILA: You depress me. Why can't you—? I guess it's because you're so terribly insecure!

LOUIE: You're not finished, are you?

SHEILA: I pretend to be a child, but you're the real child. I hate it!

LOUIE: My darling girl, for one so young you have penetrating insight—yeah! What you just said—wow! I could say that about any human being, and it would be true. Instant analysis. (Starts walking up and down the bed talking to the pillow as if it were a person.) “Vell, vell, vell, my goot Mrs. Bottomley. You are insecure—ja, ja—you are a child. In other words, not grown up, Mrs. Bottomley. (Holds his hand out to pillow.) That vill be thirty-five dollars, my goot lady!” (Faces SHEILA.) Sheila, do you happen to know anyone—anyone—who isn’t insecure, who isn’t childlike in some area—to some degree? Do you?

SHEILA: (Shouting back.) That’s exactly my point, Louie! We have no accommodation. We have no communication. Believe me—there are degrees, and I just don’t dig your degree! We don’t mesh! At least if we meshed, we could try to care—to feel. It’s not your fault—I’m just tired of being numb. Also, I’m not about to be Mama for an insecure little boy who needs constant reassurance!

LOUIE: Why in hell don’t you lie back and enjoy it?

SHEILA: In the missionary position, right? (Shakes her head.) Believe me, Louie, I’m not putting you down. I want to—(Moves to him. LOUIE is sitting on edge of platform, tying his shoes. She kneels and tries to kiss him.) I don’t know. Maybe it’s because—you’re so angry. You’re so—

LOUIE: You’re not exactly full of love, Bubeleh!

(LOUIE gives SHEILA a shove and she falls back on the floor. She stands up, rubbing her rear end and giggling. Spots the tiger’s-eye statuette and picks it up.)

SHEILA: It’s terribly ornate!

LOUIE: Put it down, Sheila. It’s very expensive!

SHEILA: (Pretends to drop it.) Ooops! Uh—is it yours?

(LOUIE tries to take the statuette away from SHEILA. She jerks away and pretends to drop it again. She giggles. She runs to platform, stands on bed, and jumps up and down, giggling. She finally gives the statuette to LOUIE.)

SHEILA: It belongs to your, uh—roommate, doesn’t it?

LOUIE: Yeah, it belongs to Robert. (Places statuette back on table.) Is there anything else you’d like to know?

SHEILA: Lots of things—but I won’t ask. I was curious about Robert. Does he have some daddy-like qualities?

LOUIE: Would you like my other ball?

SHEILA: Now you’re flattering yourself.

LOUIE: What’s that supposed to mean?

SHEILA: You want me to draw you a diagram?

LOUIE: I want to know what you mean!

SHEILA: Louie, every guy I meet accuses me of cutting off his balls. How can I do that? I don’t know. If a guy’s got balls, I can’t take them away from him. Anyway, I don’t want them!

(SHEILA puckers her lips into a kiss. Blackout. We hear the sound of her kiss—over and over—a loud, smacking noise. As the lights come up, LOUIE is center stage,

fully clothed as before. SHEILA is gone. LOUIE is looking at the record album. ROBERT enters with spray furniture polish and a rag. Goes to table, picks up the tiger's-eye statuette, and begins to polish it. Sprays the table and wipes it. LOUIE is putting things away while ROBERT is dusting. They continue doing this as they talk.)

ROBERT: Mmmm.

LOUIE: Uh—what?

ROBERT: (Concentrating on polishing.) Nothing.

LOUIE: So how are you, anyhow?

ROBERT: Okay. (Silence.)

LOUIE: Uh—how was Boston? Did you have a good time?

ROBERT: Usual routine.

(ROBERT hands ashtrays to LOUIE, who empties them and hands them back.)

LOUIE: Purty damned dull, huh?

ROBERT: I wouldn't say that. It was a change!

LOUIE: Uh—how's your mom?

ROBERT: The same.

LOUIE: How many nineteen-year-old virgins did she have lined up for you this time?

ROBERT: Ten!

LOUIE: Ten?

ROBERT: That's what I said—ten. (Silence.)

LOUIE: Uh—aren't you going to tell me about it?

ROBERT: What's to tell? Most of them were awful. Funny. After a while, I could identify the nose—Dr. Ross noses—aquiline. There was one I did like—Judy Rosenthal. Blonde and blue eyes, and a different kind of nose. Not Jewish looking at all. Something sweet about her. She couldn't keep her eyes off me. (Pause.) Louie, why don't you do something, instead of standing there like an idiot? This place stinks to high heaven.

LOUIE: (Exits with bundle. Yells from kitchen, offstage.) Bobby? (No answer. He enters.) Bobby?

ROBERT: What?

LOUIE: You want me to make dinner?

ROBERT: No.

LOUIE: I was going to make beef Stroganoff. (Slight pause.) Did you eat at your mom's?

ROBERT: I'm not hungry.

LOUIE: Uh—I've been working my tail off since you left. I've been at the library all day.

ROBERT: You said that before.

LOUIE: (Starts looking through magazines and stacks of papers for something.) I wanted to show you something, Bobby. The paper—I had it around here somewhere. This picture of a soldier kicking in the face of a suspected—that's

what the caption said—a suspected Vietcong who looks about five years old—and—get this, Bobby! The caption said that the guy who was doing the kicking was a Vietnamese Ranger, but he's so damned tall, you can't tell me he isn't an American soldier. Whew! The torture! It was like—

ROBERT: —a sweet kid and was she built. She blushed every time I looked at her.

LOUIE: Huh? (Takes carpet sweeper and starts to sweep the rug.) What did you say?

ROBERT: I forgot her name.

LOUIE: The girl you were talking about?

ROBERT: Yes.

LOUIE: Judy Rosenthal.

ROBERT: That's it. Judy Rosenthal.

LOUIE: What about her?

ROBERT: If I married her, I'd never have to worry about money again.

LOUIE: You don't have to worry now, Bobby!

ROBERT: I'm talking about real money. Her old man owns half of Boston. There's, uh—she reminds me of—what was the name of that gal I used to go with when I was in residency—you know?

LOUIE: Lila.

ROBERT: Lila! Only difference is that Judy's not aggressive like Lila was.

LOUIE: Uh—you thinking of marrying her?

ROBERT: Well, if I did, I could give Dad the money for the extra tier on the parking lot, and I'd get it later—when he passes away.

LOUIE: I guess, uh—you know how I feel. I've told you. I mean—if you find a girl you really dig—a girl who would make a good mother, uh—I think you'd make a good husband and father. You like kids, and—

ROBERT: Thank you for your permission. Look, will you empty the trash and bring me the room freshener?

(LOUIE exits and comes back a moment later with empty wastebasket and room freshener.)

LOUIE: Bobby? (No answer.) Bobby?

ROBERT: What is it now?

LOUIE: I'm sorry, Bobby! (Sprays the room with freshener.)

ROBERT: What are you talking about?

LOUIE: I really did mean to clean up the place. In fact, I did clean up the kitchen. Everything except the stove and refrigerator. I did all the dishes. I just didn't get around to this room—that's all. Didn't you notice how clean the kitchen floor is?

ROBERT: It's so clean, the roaches have established squatting rights!

LOUIE: The exterminator will be here next week. Hell, you can't blame the roaches on me. I just read about a Park Avenue apartment building that was loaded with roaches. I mean—I was going to clean up the place.

ROBERT: I don't believe you!

LOUIE: Hell, if only you hadn't surprised me! If you'd told me you were coming—the place would've been spic and span.

ROBERT: I don't want to talk about it. Forget it!

LOUIE: Why don't you try and understand me? It just isn't that important to me. It just doesn't bother me—that's all. Can't you understand that?

ROBERT: You like living like a pig. Is that it?

LOUIE: You don't fool me for a second. I know why you came home early. Just to see if I had cleaned up the apartment. Am I right, Bobby?

ROBERT: I was hoping against hope you had changed. But once a pig, always a pig.

LOUIE: I'm a slob! So what? (Sweeps furiously with carpet sweeper.)

ROBERT: I don't want to talk about it and I mean it!

LOUIE: But I do, damn it! I told you I was sorry, Bobby! What in hell do you want me to do? Christ, don't you see anything? I mean—everything in this world is all mixed up—it's filthy and twisted and cruddy. Bobby, did you ever take a long, hard look at this great city of Western civilization—did you? Really take a look at it? It's a pigsty. One big pigsty. The air is a pigsty and so is the river. The streets, too. I mean—hell—open the fucking window and the apartment's a pigsty in two seconds. You want to talk about pigsties? Our whole country is one big pigsty!

ROBERT: Are you something! You think you know everything. I'm always wrong and you're always right. You're not even a good cop-out artist. Hey, how about this? Why don't you throw in a bit of Marx, or maybe an obscure polemic by Plehanov? With your twisted logic, you could end up with Che Guevara and guerrilla warfare, and that's the reason this apartment is a pigsty. Talk, talk, talk, but what do you ever do? Isn't it about time you really did something—took some action to help this poor, sick world?

LOUIE: I am writing a novel.

ROBERT: You're going to change the world with your novel?

LOUIE: Upton Sinclair changed the meat-packing industry with *The Jungle*. But, look—I said I was sorry. I should've cleaned up the apartment.

ROBERT: Just forget it. It's L.B.J.'s fault. I'll have to call him and tell him to get his Texas ass over here and clean up the place. (LOUIE exits to kitchen. Phone rings. ROBERT picks up receiver.) Hello? Oh, hi, Mom—yes, I know it's painful. What do you want me to do about it? I gave you plenty of medication—what? The new medicine? Yes—uh-huh—I do have some samples. I'll bring them up over the holidays—(Testy.) All right, Mom, I'll send them up special delivery. (Pause.) Yes, Mother! He's okay, I guess. Yeah, just a second!

(LOUIE has entered while ROBERT is on the phone. He is holding a CorningWare coffeepot. ROBERT puts down phone, goes to bar, and fixes drink. With a wave of the hand, ROBERT indicates to LOUIE that he's wanted on the phone. Still holding coffeepot, LOUIE picks up phone. During the conversation, he moves around the room with the phone in one hand and the coffeepot in the other.)

LOUIE: Hello? Oh! How are you, Mrs. Ginsberg? You sound wonderful—just great. You know, I really did want to come up with Robert, but I've been so darn busy

here. Yes—uh-huh—that’s a shame. I’ll make sure it gets in the mail right away—air mail, special delivery. I’m sure you’ll be feeling better. Of course I know—I’ve had terrible trouble with my back, too. There is nothing worse than pain, Mrs. Ginsberg. We just don’t know how lucky we are to be healthy. Yeah, he’s always raving about your vegetable soup. What? Oh, I’ve never seen him look so good—so healthy. Yes, I’m making a pot of coffee right now, and we’re going to bed early. Oh, yes, Mrs. Ginsberg, he told me all about the nice girls he met and the wonderful vacation—yes. He said it was a shame he had to come back so early, but he does have to check up on some patients—you know how it is—never a moment’s rest. Oh, yes, Mrs. Ginsberg. Her name was Judy, wasn’t it? He said she was lovely. He flipped over her. Yes, he wants to see her again when he comes up for the holidays. Oh, no, he’ll call her, Mrs. Ginsberg. Uh—no, don’t say anything to her. You know how Robert is. He doesn’t like to be pushed. He wants to reach his own decision. After all, he’s no kid—he’s thirty-one. Yes—he really liked her. (Pause.) Oh, yes, I’m fine. Working hard on the novel. It’s nice talking to you, Mrs. Ginsberg. I’ll see you over the holidays. Bye, now! (Hangs up. Picks up coffeepot and goes into kitchen.)

ROBERT: (Smiling.) He’s too much.

LOUIE: (Comes running in with paper.) I found the picture I was telling you about. (No answer.) Bobby? Listen to me. Here’s the photo. U.P.I.

ROBERT: What picture?

LOUIE: The one where the American soldier is torturing the Vietcong kid.

ROBERT: What in hell are you talking about?

LOUIE: Look at it—please, Bobby?

ROBERT: Louie, I’m not interested in your far-out propaganda!

LOUIE: Far-out prop—? It’s *The New York Times*!

ROBERT: What’s so reliable about *The New York Times*?

LOUIE: What’s so reliable about it? It’s your paper, Bobby!

ROBERT: What’s yours—the *Daily Worker*?

LOUIE: They don’t put it out daily anymore. Bobby, just look at the photo!

ROBERT: What are you trying to prove? Look, I’ve seen that crap a thousand times, and what does it have to do with your copping out—with you always copping out? C’mon—tell me!

LOUIE: I’m copping out? Whew! You—?

ROBERT: Yeah—in your pseudo-Marxist way—always making excuses for everything!

LOUIE: I am? I see—I see!

ROBERT: (Mimicking.) You see—you see—you see nothing!

LOUIE: If you’d just look at the picture of this poor Vietcong kid, Bobby. Don’t you see, even if I don’t have a foot to stand on, even if I am a cop-out artist, it doesn’t destroy the truth that Americans are torturing women and children in Vietnam. Why can’t—?

ROBERT: You believe in “Do what I say but not what I do”—that’s all. “It’s all right for anyone else in the world, but it’s not all right for me.” That’s the way you talk, and that’s why you’ve got no validity in anything you say or do. Now—will you leave me alone? I don’t want to talk—on and on and on—about subjects you know nothing about. I’m sick and tired of all this crap, and I mean it. Sick and tired, Louie! You talk about the starving world, and look at all of this—the way you live. You’ve got everything. And it’s because you live here—in the United States—that’s why. If you’re so concerned for the starving masses—you know what you can do!

LOUIE: (Very hurt. He knows what ROBERT means.) What’s that?

ROBERT: What do you mean, “What’s that”?

LOUIE: You know what I mean.

ROBERT: No, I don’t know what you mean.

LOUIE: You do, too!

ROBERT: I don’t know what in hell you’re talking about!

LOUIE: You want me to leave? (No answer.) Do you want me to leave?

ROBERT: (Pause.) Do you want to?

LOUIE: Answer my question, God damn it! You want me to move out?

ROBERT: It’s up to you.

LOUIE: I see—in other words, you don’t care one way or another, is that it? (No answer.) Answer me, Bobby!

ROBERT: I didn’t say that!

LOUIE: That’s what you said, and you know it. Okay, okay, God damn it, if—if you want me to—if you want me to leave—if you think I’m such a cop-out artist—oh, what the hell!

(LOUIE is crying as he runs into kitchen. ROBERT is immobile for ten seconds, then looks toward kitchen.)

ROBERT: Louie? (No answer.) Louie?

LOUIE: What?

ROBERT: Do you know where I put the TV Guide?

(Ten-second pause, then LOUIE enters. They stare at each other. ROBERT is making no attempt to look for TV Guide. LOUIE finds it on chair and hands it to ROBERT. There is a moment when both of them are completely still. ROBERT is holding the TV Guide, but not looking at it.)

ROBERT: (With love in his voice.) Louie, is this Sunday?

LOUIE: This is Sunday, Bobby.

ROBERT: Oh, good. Uh—Louie, how come you’re still wearing the patch? Is it still sensitive to light?

LOUIE: Uh-huh.

ROBERT: You been using the drops regularly?

LOUIE: Uh—most of the time.

(ROBERT moves to LOUIE. Puts his arm around him, pulls him close. For five seconds, they look into each other's eyes.)

ROBERT: Get my bag. I'll take a look at your eye.

(LOUIE exits and a moment later comes back with a medical bag, which he hands to ROBERT.)

ROBERT: You've got to put in the drops twice a day—and don't forget! (Reaches out, takes off the patch from LOUIE's eye. Takes ophthalmoscope from bag, shines light into LOUIE's eye.) Very good. (Smiles.) It's all cleared up. You can stop wearing the patch.

LOUIE: (Smiling back.) I sort of like it.

ROBERT: I said stop wearing it. Would you put my bag away? (Pause.) Is the coffee ready?

LOUIE: In a minute, Bobby.

ROBERT: You got any cookies?

LOUIE: Chocolate chip—fresh from the bakery.

(ROBERT sits on sofa. LOUIE retrieves a paper sack of cookies from the kitchen. Picks up plate from coffee table, blows off the dirt, and dumps cookies on the plate. He stuffs one into his mouth and goes back into kitchen. Comes out with cups and saucers, napkins, and trivet. Puts them down, rushes into kitchen, comes out with coffeepot, and puts it on trivet. Goes to television set. Flips it on, stands back, adjusts it. The theme music comes up on "Walt Disney's The Wonderful World of Color." LOUIE pours coffee, but his attention is on the television screen. At last, he sits next to ROBERT. The lights dim slowly as ROBERT and LOUIE sit watching television. Finally, all the lights are out except for the television screen.)

CURTAIN



**Claude Barbazon as Mike and Don Barshay as Joe in *How Come You Don't Dig Chicks?*
Playwrights Workshop Club, New York City, 1967.**

Photo by Joseph Di Giorgio

HOW COME YOU DON'T DIG CHICKS?

1967

How Come You Don't Dig Chicks? was first produced by the Playwrights Workshop Club in New York in May of 1967, with Claude Barbazon as Mike and Don Barshay as Joe. It received a second staging with the same cast at the Troupe Theatre Club in New York in June of the same year on a double bill with *Daddy Violet*. In *The Village Voice*, Michael Smith wrote, "The play is no more than an anecdote, but its delicacy and honesty are special." *How Come You Don't Dig Chicks?* was subsequently revived by the Atma Coffeehouse Theatre in Boston in April of 1968. Writing in *The Broadside*, Jan Chartier called that production "a moving human experience."

CHARACTERS:

MIKE, 40 Balding, effete.

JOE, 25 A street hustler.

THE TIME: The summer of 1966.

THE SET: The living room of MIKE's apartment in New York City. Portable television upstage against wall. Couch downstage right. Coffee table and record player. A Monet print on upstage flat. Next to the television is a desk with typewriter, a mess of papers. The couch is full of books and newspapers. A big bookcase on wall.

(Stage is in darkness. MIKE enters and switches on lamp. JOE is right behind him. JOE is wearing a leather jacket, tight blue jeans, and a tight T-shirt that shows off his muscular body.)

MIKE: The place is not very tidy. (Puts paper bag with two six-packs of beer on desk and moves to couch.) I'll move some of this. (He does.)

JOE: That beer we drank at the bar—in one end and out the other.

(They exit stage left. A moment later, MIKE comes back. Crosses to record player and puts on an instrumental—low. As he is selecting more records, we hear the flush of the john. JOE re-enters, combing his hair.)

MIKE: I'll get you a beer.

(JOE sits on couch. MIKE opens two beers and hands one to JOE. MIKE goes back to record player.)

JOE: Nice pad you got here.

MIKE: Thanks, Joe.

JOE: I bet it costs an arm and a leg, huh?

MIKE: Rent control. Anything special you'd like to hear, Joe?

JOE: You got any Johnny Cash?

MIKE: Uh—I don't think so.

JOE: It don' make no difference.

(A silence as MIKE selects records and puts them on. Gets his beer from table and sits on couch next to JOE.)

MIKE: Uh—you from out of town, Joe?

JOE: Newburgh.

MIKE: That's upstate, right?

JOE: Yeah.

MIKE: That's the town that had all that publicity—something about cutting down the relief rolls, wasn't it?

JOE: I dunno. Haven't been back in a couple years.

MIKE: I see. Uh—does your family live there?

JOE: The ex-wife.

MIKE: You got any kids, Joe?

JOE: Boy.

MIKE: Ah—(Awkward pause. Trying to start a conversation.) Have you been in Manhattan long?

JOE: 'Bout a month.

MIKE: I see. Uh—what do you think of it?

JOE: Of what?

MIKE: New York.

JOE: It's for the birds. Shit, you gotta be loaded with loot to make out with the chicks.

MIKE: (Smiles.) It's tough when you first get here. I stayed at the Y.M.C.A. on 34th Street—the Sloan House. I didn't know a soul and I was flat broke.

JOE: What kind of work you do?

MIKE: I'm, uh—a writer, Joe.

JOE: Rider? What do you ride?

MIKE: A writer. With a "T."

JOE: What d'ya write?

MIKE: Short stories—poetry—things like that!

JOE: You make yer livin' at it?

MIKE: Well—I make my living by writing articles for nudist magazines.

JOE: What magazines?

MIKE: Nudist magazines. I made a really good living from them for a long time, but now they're going out of style. Hard-core pornography is the latest thing.

JOE: You write dirty stories?

MIKE: I write all different kinds of articles about the joys of nudism. I'll show you.

(MIKE goes to bookcase, where there is a big stack of nudist magazines. Picks out four or five and crosses back to couch. Flips to a page in one of them, holds

it in front of JOE.) See this one? It's about this gal who plays the cello. She gave a concert in the nude—she wore battery-run propellers on her breasts.

JOE: (Looking at picture.) Son of a bitch. You ain't kiddin' me, are ya, fella? (Turns page.) Look at this one! (Turns page.) What the fuck is this one doing in a nudist camp?

MIKE: What do you mean?

JOE: (Holds magazine in front of MIKE.) She's a big fat slob. Will you look at these boobs? They're hanging down to her bellybutton. Son of a bitch! (Laughs.) I'll bet that's her husband. Skinny fart, but he's got a big whang on 'im. Goddam! You ever bin to a nudist camp?

MIKE: A few times—on the West Coast.

JOE: (Horny. Feeling himself.) Did you get a hard-on?

MIKE: I thought I would but I didn't.

JOE: (Finds large picture in the centerfold. Moves closer to lamp to see it.) Son of a bitch, fella. Look! Is she built! Ooooh! I'd give anything to jam it into her hot pussy! (Looks at MIKE.) I bet they have org-ees (Mispronounces "orgies") and everything, huh?

MIKE: Orgies.

JOE: What?

MIKE: Nothing. I don't think they have orgies—they have to be careful. They were almost closed up in the late Thirties when they were always raided, and there had been—

JOE: Son of a bitch. Any of these nudie chicks live around here?

MIKE: Most of these nudist resorts are in California.

JOE: You know any swingers?

MIKE: Well, uh—

JOE: Any whores?

MIKE: Not any more. I did a few years back.

JOE: Oh. (Puts magazine down and looks at MIKE.) I bet you make a lot of loot writing about this stuff!

MIKE: I wish I did. I make just enough to get by on, Joe.

JOE: I bet. How 'bout givin' me the ten-spot now?

MIKE: What?

JOE: The bread, fella.

MIKE: C'mon, Joe!

JOE: What d'ya mean, c'mon?

MIKE: I'm going to give it to you. I mean—

JOE: What you think—I'm gonna take the loot and walk out on you? That what you think, fella?

MIKE: I didn't say that, Joe.

JOE: So give me five now and the rest after.

MIKE: Okay, okay, if that's the way you want it, Joe. (Takes out wallet and gives ten-dollar bill to JOE.) Here, Joe.

JOE: Um—

(A moment of silence. JOE goes back to reading nudist magazines, flipping through them.)

MIKE: Your parents still live in Newburgh?

JOE: (Not looking up from magazine.) What, fella?

MIKE: Your parents.

JOE: They split up when I was a kid, and my mom run off with some jerk from the railroad. (Holds up magazine.) Hey, fella, look at this blonde. The real McCoy!

MIKE: Interesting.

JOE: *How Come You Don't Dig Chicks?*

MIKE: (Smiles.) What makes you think I don't dig them?

JOE: You kidding, fella? How old are you?

MIKE: I'm forty.

JOE: What do you get out of it?

MIKE: Out of what?

JOE: Going down on a guy?

MIKE: Let me ask you a question, Joe. What are you doing here?

JOE: What are you talkin' 'bout, fella?

MIKE: I'll repeat the question. What are you doing here?

JOE: For the bread—what the fuck you think?

MIKE: Purely a matter of economics, right, Joe?

JOE: Of what?

MIKE: Bread, loot, money. In other words, you don't enjoy getting sucked—

JOE: Look, fella, if you think I'm queer, you've got another guess—

MIKE: I wasn't saying that, uh—particularly. Forget it, Joe.

JOE: (Pause.) You bin queer all yer life?

MIKE: Well—

JOE: Didja ever hit the sack with a girl?

MIKE: Why all this sudden interest?

JOE: I just wanna know.

MIKE: I was married for eight years.

JOE: You kiddin', fella?

MIKE: No, I'm not kiddin', fella.

JOE: Shit, man, why did you go in for this queer crap, huh?

MIKE: You want me to tell you about it?

JOE: Yeah! I wanna hear 'bout it!

MIKE: Okay. Well, I'd just split up with my wife in Venice, California. It was about five years ago. Boy, did I hit the skids—I didn't give a shit about anything. I

went on a five-day drunk and the next thing I remember, some guy was waking me up in Pershing Square in downtown L.A., telling me the fuzz would throw me in the queer tank in Lincoln Heights if they caught me sleeping on a park bench. Why he said "the queer tank," I don't know. Anyway, he bought me breakfast, took me to his place, and I stayed with him for a couple of days. All he did was blow me—I didn't mind. For the next few months, I hustled the gay guys—I was rough trade. Then I met a hustler in the park—we got a room together to save money. We got drunk one night and the next thing I remember, we were in the hotel room and I was blowing him. Ever since then I realized I was gay.

JOE: Goddam! (Snaps his fingers.) Just like that, huh?

MIKE: Who knows? I do remember this one thing—when I was a kid in this Catholic school, I had this thing for this one priest—Father Anthony—I always wanted to be around him. (MIKE finishes his beer.) I've got to go to the bathroom. Don't run off.

JOE: Don't worry about it, fella!

(MIKE exits. JOE stands up quickly. Moves to television set. Pushes down antenna, takes out the plug, wraps the wire cord around set. Takes typewriter, puts it in portable case, snaps lid shut. JOE is facing upstage as he reaches into his pocket and pulls out switchblade knife. MIKE re-enters. JOE moves to him quickly. The knife goes to MIKE's throat.)

JOE: Don't move, fella. (MIKE stands motionless.) The watch and your wallet. (MIKE doesn't move.) Come on, fella!

MIKE: Joe, I—

JOE: One move and it's all over—you're dead!

MIKE: I won't move a muscle. I'm not that stupid.

JOE: Shut up, fella. The watch and the wallet.

MIKE: No.

JOE: (Shocked.) What d'ya mean, no?

MIKE: I can't, Joe.

JOE: What in hell is—?

MIKE: I just can't. I've been robbed five times by hustlers, Joe.

JOE: Fella, if you don't—

MIKE: No sense talking about it, Joe.

JOE: Gimme the fuckin' watch! Now!

MIKE: No!

JOE: Okay, fella, you're askin' fer it.

MIKE: There's only one way you'll get my watch and wallet.

JOE: I'm gonna count to five, and if you don't give me your watch and your wallet, I'm gonna cut you wide open!

MIKE: I can't!

JOE: One—two—three—four—five.

(Ten seconds of silence. They are motionless. Finally, JOE takes knife away from MIKE's throat, but still holds knife pointed at MIKE.)

JOE: Son of a bitch—son of a bitch!

MIKE: What?

JOE: Don't move or I'll—

MIKE: I'm wobbly. You mind if I sit?

JOE: Go on. In the chair. I gotta tie you up.

MIKE: Why, Joe?

JOE: The cops—I don't want you to call 'em.

MIKE: You're kidding.

JOE: What, fella?

MIKE: I wouldn't call them, Joe.

JOE: I've got to.

MIKE: I hate the bastards, Joe.

JOE: I can't take that chance. I've been in the slammer too many times.

MIKE: Me, too, Joe. I just couldn't call them, Joe. I had a cop beat the shit out of me in L.A. A vice-squad son of a bitch. Joe? Would you please put the knife away?

JOE: Tell me about the cop who beat you up.

MIKE: Okay, Joe. I will. Well, I saw this good-looking guy in blue jeans and boots, and he walked up to me and asked me directions, and we began to talk. One thing led to another, and I said I was looking for a room, and did he want to share it with me and pay half. He said okay and we were walking down the street, and he asked me what I liked to do in the sack with guys, and I said everything. The next thing, he pulls out this badge and handcuffs—zip—at the same time. I thought he was some kind of a nut, so I pulled away and the next thing I remember, I was lying on the sidewalk face-down with my hands handcuffed behind my back. In court, he gets up on the stand and says that I told him that I give the best blow job in town—in front of a jury. I was convicted of indecent talk in public.

(JOE looks at MIKE. Puts the knife in his pocket.)

JOE: Son of a bitch! Son of a bitch! What did you say yer name is?

MIKE: Mike James.

JOE: You really got guts, Mike.

MIKE: Not guts, Joe. It was—desperation.

JOE: (Shakes his head in wonder.) You're awright!

MIKE: I think I could use another beer.

JOE: I'll get it for you, Mike. (Gets beer and opens it.) A fucking knife at your throat. Son of a bitch!

MIKE: I'm still shaking, Joe. (Takes ring from finger.) Joe? Here.

JOE: (Turns away.) Shit, Mike, you make me feel like—

MIKE: Take it, will you? I want you to have it!

JOE: I feel like a son of a bitch. I—

MIKE: Don't feel that way, Joe. Here!

(Finally, JOE takes the ring. Looks at MIKE and then at the ring. Slips it on his finger.)

JOE: Uh—Mike? You want me to stay with you?

MIKE: (Shakes his head.) No, Joe.

JOE: Okay, if that's the way you feel!

(JOE hesitates for a moment, then picks up MIKE's typewriter case. Sets it on MIKE's desk. Opens it up and takes typewriter out of the case. Sets typewriter on the desk. Unwraps the cord from around the television set, plugs it back in the wall, and pulls up the antenna. Grabs his jacket from the back of the chair and puts it on.)

JOE: (Standing in doorway.) I guess I better cut out. Uh—Mike?

MIKE: Yeah, Joe?

JOE: Be careful who you pick up.

MIKE: (Smiles.) I will, Joe.

JOE: I'll see you. (Exits. A moment later, he re-enters.) I, uh—

MIKE: Yes, Joe?

JOE: I dig ya, fella! (Exits.)

(MIKE sits. Leans back on sofa. Then he picks up a nudist magazine and thumbs through it. Finally, he stands up. Goes to record player and turns it up loud. The rock-and-roll music blares. Listens to it for a second, then goes over to typewriter. Moves it slightly. Now he smiles. He laughs. Finds a sheet of paper and puts it in typewriter. Begins to type as—the lights go down.)

CURTAIN

DADDY VIOLET

(1967)

Daddy Violet was first produced on a double bill with *How Come You Don't Dig Chicks?* at the Troupe Theatre Club in New York City in June of 1967, produced by Christopher St. John and directed by the author, with the following cast:

Sylvienne StraussActress
George BirimisaActor One
Dan LeachActor Two

“This is a small, slight play,” wrote Michael Smith, reviewing the production in *The Village Voice*, “surprisingly forceful and genuinely original.”

Other productions have been presented in San Francisco, Baltimore, Ann Arbor, at the Festival of Contemporary Arts at the University of British Columbia in Canada, and at the Caffè Cino in New York. *Daddy Violet* can be performed on the side of a mountain, in an auditorium, or even in a classroom.

A revival was performed at the Boston Conservatory on November 10th, 2006, directed by Tim Cava, featuring Ilana Toeplitz, Chris Ruth, and Andrew Durand. The version of the script published here was updated for that production, and substitutes Iraq for Vietnam. The original version of *Daddy Violet* was published in Return to the Caffè Cino and Prism International.

The name of each actor is also the name of his character in the play. In this version, the author has retained the names of the actors in the original production—they created the roles. In performance, the actors must revise the spoken text of *Daddy Violet* to reflect the reality of the current production. The play contains pools of improvisation.

Where is the real beginning of *Daddy Violet*?

THE TIME: The actual time of the performance.

THE SET: A platform on an otherwise bare stage.

(GEORGE is vacuuming an aisle of the theater as the audience enters. SYLVIENCE is handing out programs. GEORGE puts away the vacuum cleaner, gets a broom, and sweeps the empty stage. He is drinking a can of beer.)

GEORGE: (Shouting at SYLVIENCE.) Do you have enough programs?

SYLVIENCE: More than enough. (Pause.) It's chilly in here.

GEORGE: If we sell out it will warm up.

SYLVIENCE: When was the last time that happened?

(During the play, the houselights stay on because the actors have to see the audience and relate to them.)

GEORGE: (Moving down the aisle.) Lift your feet, please. (Sweeps under their feet.) Go on talking, everybody. I haven't finished sweeping. (Shouts.) Dan?

DAN: (Offstage.) George?

GEORGE: What?

DAN: How's the house?

GEORGE: (Looks at audience.) How are you?

AUDIENCE: Okay! Swell, etc.

GEORGE: They're fine.

DAN: How many?

GEORGE: Uh—maybe twenty?

DAN: Not bad for a Tuesday.

GEORGE: Dan, hurry up onstage. I can't think of anything else to say. (Speaking to a man in the audience.) Did the Yankees win today?

OLD MAN: I don't give a damn about them—

(When SYLVIENCE finishes passing out the programs, she takes a mirror from her pocket and looks at her reflection.)

GEORGE: (To SYLVIENCE.) Come on, honey.

SYLVIENCE: Okay! Okay! (Puts down programs and joins GEORGE onstage.)

GEORGE: What are you going to work on?

SYLVIENCE: My relaxation and radiation.

GEORGE: Good girl.

(SYLVIENCE stands motionless. She is working on her radiation.)

SYLVIENCE: (Lets out an animal sound.) Grrrr!

GEORGE: (Testy.) Dan, we've started the improv! Will you puh-lease—?

(DAN enters down aisle and very quickly disappears backstage.)

GEORGE: (To the audience.) He's a little bit on the temperamental side. (To DAN.) What are you going to work on?

DAN: (Backstage.) Probably my psychological gesture.

GEORGE: Which one?

DAN: (Enters.) This one! (Gives GEORGE the middle finger.)

GEORGE: How about some music to soothe your savage soul?

DAN: Give me an oldie.

(GEORGE runs to the back of the house. He puts on "Dedicated to the One I Love" by the Mamas and the Papas. DAN goes into the audience and picks out a girl. He takes her hand and escorts her to the stage and they dance. A man comes onstage with another man and they dance. An older man asks SYLVIENCE to dance. When the song is over, GEORGE turns off the stereo.)

GEORGE: You in the right mood now, Dan?

(DAN flops down on the stage with his bare feet in the air.)

GEORGE: He's working on his relaxation exercises. Let me see—what will I—? My radiation—yes!

(This is an improv section. GEORGE runs out into audience. He picks out a woman. He bends over—about six inches away from her face. If the woman looks away, he goes to another person—this time a man. If the person is wearing glasses, he tells them to take them off. GEORGE reacts to each person depending on what he sees or feels.)

GEORGE: (Ad lib.) You have soulful eyes. You are a dreamer, etc.

(GEORGE runs back onto the stage.)

GEORGE: (Talking to the audience.) I stopped smoking three days ago and my nerves are on edge, so—my relaxation—yes. (Puts hands to his neck. The actor who plays this role must find the area where he is tense and utilize that area.) For me to fully radiate I must be completely relaxed, and this is my area of tension. (Has both hands to his neck and twists—sometimes it cracks.) Uh—Sylvienne?

SYLVIENCE: Yes, George?

GEORGE: Help me with my neck.

(GEORGE is kneeling onstage, bent forward. SYLVIENCE gets behind him.)

SYLVIENCE: Relax your shoulders and back. Now let your head go—back and forth—back and forth. Now around and around—faster—faster. Now the other way.

(GEORGE finally stops. He grabs his beer and wends his way through the audience, talking to them.)

GEORGE: There's nothing symbolic about this beer. I get stage fright before my entrance and—(Shrugs.) I'm going outside to breathe in the freedom air of Greenwich Village and work on my psychological gesture.

DAN: What is it? (GEORGE smiles as he gives DAN the middle finger.) Birimisa, how long do you want to go on with this improv?

GEORGE: Is that what this is?

(GEORGE exits. SYLVIENCE faces the audience. She feels her stomach. She pushes at it very hard. She is relating to the audience.)

SYLVIENCE: Will I ever break the armor? (Puts her hands on her hips.) Tighten my buttocks and, uh—boom! (Does a side bump, barely moving her hips.) Shit, I've got to—(Tries the bump to the other side and then to the front. It's a lousy bump and grind. Tries again—not very good. Runs offstage and talks to a man in the audience.) I'm sure you have no idea how important it is for me to break through. Do you understand? Do you? (Runs back onstage. Swivels her hips very slowly.) One—two—three—four! Boom! Boom! Boom! (She is very proud of herself. Runs into the audience and finds another man.) Do you think if I sang a song it would help me to break through? (As she sings "Then He Kissed Me," she does a sexy dance and is very good at it. When she is finished with the song, she runs up to another man and gets an inch away from him and puckers up her lips. Then she runs onstage—she crouches and becomes a seed and slowly blooms into a flower.) Violet?

(SYLVienne gets up, points to where she was “blooming” a moment before.)

SYLVienne: (Bashful, as she talks to audience.) Hi, everybody! She says her name is Violet but her real name is Sylvienne. She quit Harvard and came to the Big Apple six months ago. She is doing her Michael Chekhov exercises. (Pause.) The famous drama teacher? Does anyone here know who he is? (Pause.) I think he was the nephew of Anton Chekhov. (Asking.) Does anyone know who Anton Chekhov is? (Many hands go up. Runs upstage. Again she tries to be a violet. She is not very good.) I better get to work on my Chekho—Chekhovian center! (Stands ramrod straight with her hands at her sides and her eyes closed.) Where—where is the center of my being? (Feels different parts of her body. Touches each breast.) I know where it’s supposed to be, but it just isn’t there. George and Dan are so—so good at centers! (Back to feeling her body.) I know it’s not in my abdominal cage. Maybe it’s in my stomach. (Feels her stomach. Crosses the stage with her stomach protruding, trying to put her center in her stomach. Shrugs her shoulders.) Not too bad for a beginner. Now I’m going to work on my vaginal center. (Closes her eyes.) Con-cen-trate, vag-i-nal! (Closes her eyes and smiles.) Imagine a string is attached to my vag—(Pantomimes a string attached to her vagina. Winks at a man in the audience who is wearing glasses. Sits on his lap. Takes off his glasses. She is now doing a bad imitation of Marilyn Monroe.) You have sexy eyes.

(At one performance, SYLVienne sat on a man’s lap and said:)

SYLVienne: What are you doing after the show?

MAN: What’s your vaginal center doing after the show?

(At another performance SYLVienne went to a woman and said:)

SYLVienne: Would you like to pull my string?

WOMAN: I would love to.

MAN ONE: How ’bout pulling my string?

MAN TWO: (Turning to the first man.) Let’s pull them together.

SYLVienne: (Center stage.) That’s enough for warm-ups. I better get with it. (Back to being a violet.) Me, Violet! Violet! Violet! (Sings as she dances across the stage.) Vi-o-let! Violet! Vi—i-ah-i-ah-o—let! I am blooming on the side of a mountain very high! I have broken through the rock-encrusted earth and I’ve pushed through the scraggly weeds. (Pantomimes pushing out of the earth.) Violet! Violet! Violet! I can feel the morning sun opening me up and below—below—below—(Looks down in the abyss in front of the platform and pulls away, frightened. Goes back to previous line.) I can feel the morning sun opening me up and below—below—the fog is a solid blanket hiding the—the—(Long pause. Turns away.) Violet! Violet! Violet! The—sun—is—on—me. (Silently she dances. She is breathing heavily as she stops and looks at the audience.) Dan told me that Isadora Duncan did it much better seventy-fifty years ago—(Pause.) and she did it stark nekkid.

(GEORGE comes striding down aisle from back of theater. He has left broom onstage. He takes it backstage. Then he comes downstage. He looks at audience.)

GEORGE: I'm thirty-three years old. (Pulls down his lower lip and shows a missing tooth.) I lost this tooth in a fight last week over some gal I can't even remember. I guess that's because I got my center in my crotch. (Closes his eyes and clenches his fists.) I've got to get it out of there! (Pause as he grits his teeth.) I am not a sex object! I am not a sex object! (Stands straight, closing his eyes, trying by will power to get his center out of his crotch.) My center is not in my crotch. (Pounds his heart.) It's in my fuckin' heart! My heart!

(GEORGE opens his eyes. Looks at individuals in the audience. Begins to moan softly and then falls to the stage, his head over the edge. He is clutching his genitals. He is in terrible pain—he moans softly.)

SYLVIEENNE: (Lets out a shriek.) I am a beautiful violet! (Her hands frame her face—her fingers flutter.) My name is Violet!

GEORGE: (Sits up.) You want to know something?

SYLVIEENNE: What, George?

GEORGE: You can't be a violet!

SYLVIEENNE: Why not?

GEORGE: Because you don't have the inner soul of a violet, Violet—Violet.

SYLVIEENNE: You called me Violet!

GEORGE: I did?

SYLVIEENNE: (Moves toward GEORGE, very sexy.) Ummmm.

(GEORGE's body begins to undulate. He is turning into a flower. Moves downstage, his body becoming graceful, a slow-motion dance that is a flower. He is feeling the beauty of his body.)

GEORGE: My inner child is coming out to play.

SYLVIEENNE: It is?

GEORGE: Yes—yes—at last. It is no longer terrified of all the—

SYLVIEENNE: (Fascinated.) Ooooh! From a weak, scraggly weed, you're turning into a magnificent violet.

GEORGE: I'm—a delicate lavender—like a high cloud as dawn is breaking. Will you call me Violet?

SYLVIEENNE: How are you, Violet?

GEORGE: (Feeling his ankles.) My chlorophyll is cool—so cool—(His hands move up his legs until he slowly pulls off his T-shirt and holds it over his head.) and oozing upward from the bounty of the good earth.

SYLVIEENNE: So beautiful, Violet!

GEORGE: (Feeling his body.) Tell me of my magnificence.

SYLVIEENNE: You are radiant.

GEORGE: I am not a sex object?

SYLVIEENNE: Your center is in your heart.

(GEORGE has undulated in front of her face. They are both radiant as they look at one another. GEORGE does wild flower gyrations. Hypnotized, SYLVIEENNE follows him. GEORGE begins to sing to her.)

GEORGE: (Singing.) Violet! Violet! Violet!

SYLVIENCE: (Singing back to him.) I am blooming on the side of a mountain very high.

GEORGE: (Touching her hands, still singing.) You have broken through the rock-encrusted earth and you've—(Grabs her wrists and pulls her to a standing position.) pushed through the scraggly weeds. (Moves around her in a dance movement. Sings "Violet" over and over. Then they rub petals and he pulls her down to the floor of the stage. They are kneeling on the stage, and he is feeling the softness of her petals.) Violet!

SYLVIENCE: Yes, Violet?

GEORGE: (His hand moving up her arm.) You are—

SYLVIENCE: Yes, Violet?

GEORGE: So—so pretty.

SYLVIENCE: Yes? Yes? (GEORGE's arms are around her now. He presses his body against hers in animal sexuality. He kisses her hands.)

GEORGE: Your petals are—

SYLVIENCE: Oh, Violet! You—

GEORGE: (Rubbing against her.) Softly smooth and so—so sensual.

SYLVIENCE: Your, uh—your corolla, uh—is—is—

GEORGE: (Kissing her neck.) Yes, Violet?

SYLVIENCE: It's an exciting magenta with a tinge of white.

GEORGE: (Touching her breast.) You've got a wild-looking stamen.

SYLVIENCE: And how—how is your calyx?

GEORGE: Early morning cool. (Feeling her buttocks.) You are so delicate!

SYLVIENCE: You are transcendent!

GEORGE: You are, dearest, lovelier than all the varieties of violets. (Pulls up her skirt and touches her vagina.) I'm falling in love with you. I—

(SYLVIENCE jumps up and punches him in the chest with all her might.)

SYLVIENCE: I am not like the others! I'm not like the others!

GEORGE: Why, you stupid little apprentice! (Runs offstage and addresses a man.) That stupid bitch doesn't know the first fucking thing about acting.

(DAN enters. His arms are outspread. He is flying. He runs to center stage and begins to do his flying exercise. He looks like a huge bird flying very, very high.)

GEORGE: (Talking to a woman in the audience.) He's flying now, really flying. (DAN continues flying as GEORGE moves down aisle, talking to different people.) There was a time when I thought I could be another Marlon Brando, but look at this kid.

(DAN is now doing a molding exercise. A molding exercise is defined as thinking of the air as a canvas and your body as the paintbrush, and molding the air into an expressionist painting. DAN is moving gracefully across the stage, totally in his own world.)

GEORGE: This kid has only been studying the Chekhovian method for five years, and I've been studying it for twelve. I could watch him forever. (Pause.) Uh—Dan?

DAN: What is it, Birimisa?

GEORGE: Do you feel up to your famous turkey?

(DAN faces audience. He starts with his chin and slowly works up to his eyes, then down to his arms, his back and his feet. [Mr. Leach went to a turkey farm, and spent hours studying the turkeys at the zoo.] After he fully becomes the turkey, he jumps off the platform and hops about as the ungainly turkey, then approaches an individual in the audience. He gets very close with the open-eyed stare of the turkey.)

DAN: Gobble—gobble—gobble! (The gobble is very fierce and very angry.) Gobble—gobble—gobble! (To another person.) Gobble—gobble—gobble! (Jumps onstage and stares at the audience as the turkey.)

GEORGE: That deserves a round of applause! (Audience applauds. DAN goes back to his molding exercises, completely involved in his own world.) Dan, let's show these wonderful people what a really great actor can do. (No answer.) Mr. Leach?

DAN: What?

GEORGE: (Looking at audience, then back to DAN.) Let's put your center in your, uh—chest!

DAN: My chest?

GEORGE: Please!

(DAN is motionless. Then he goes through a transformation. He becomes super macho. He struts into the audience. He approaches a pretty girl.)

DAN: Are you the one who ordered take-out? (A big smile as he grabs his crotch.) I got your foot-long right here, babe.

(If she doesn't answer, DAN moves on to another girl. Responses are different at every performance.)

DAN: (To a woman who looks like a diva.) Hey, cutie, give me some booty.

WOMAN: (Ad lib from the audience.) Get lost.

GEORGE: Okay, Dan, would you please come back on stage?

DAN: (Reluctantly returns to the stage.) Fuckin' hos!

GEORGE: Let's show our wonderful audience your versatility—as one of the greatest actors on the American stage. (DAN looks down his nose at the audience, the egotistical matinee idol from the past.) Put your center in your mouth.

DAN: My mouth?

GEORGE: Give it a try.

(DAN is motionless—he is in deep thought. His movement changes. He slowly changes into a screaming faggot. He goes into an ecstasy of gayness. His eyes light up as he picks out a good-looking guy in the audience. He swishes over to the guy and runs his hand through the guy's hair. Most guys go along with it,

but at a performance at the Firehouse Theater in Minneapolis one young man stood up and said:)

YOUNG MAN: Get away from me, you fuckin' faggot!

DAN: (Ad lib.) Oops! Wrong number. (Goes up to another man.) Ooooh. Ooooh!

GEORGE: What is it, Dan?

DAN: I don't know. I've never had my center in my mouth before.

GEORGE: It's brilliant work!

DAN: I'm afraid that I—

GEORGE: Afraid of what?

DAN: (Mesmerized by a very handsome man.) I don't know. I've never experienced anything like this. It's like—heavens to Betsy—it's—

GEORGE: (Hits DAN on shoulder the way a straight man might do.) Are you freakin' out?

DAN: (A big grin. Looking for another man.) It's fabulous! (Flirts with all the men.) Now I can understand the whole high-camp mystique of Susan Sontag and cuddly Jerry Falwell.

GEORGE: (Questioning.) Jerry Falwell?

DAN: It takes one to know one, honey, it takes one to know one!

GEORGE: Dan, onstage, please! (DAN doesn't move.) Put your center back in your chest. I want you to be like Tom Cruise in—

DAN: (Utter horror.) That closet queen?

GEORGE: You think he's queer?

DAN: (Hand to chest.) Puh-lease!

GEORGE: Then think of Brad Pitt! Johnny Depp!

DAN: (Turned on.) Together?

GEORGE: Get a grip, fella!

DAN: I absolutely adore my new persona!

GEORGE: (Makes a fist—very threatening.) But you're the greatest actor, with the biggest balls.

DAN: Puh-lease, Birimisa. I love my center right where it is. (Runs around looking for another guy.) I love it! I love it! I love it!

GEORGE: Think macho!

DAN: (Stands in front of another guy.) Ooooh!

GEORGE: Get back on stage!

(DAN reluctantly returns to the stage.)

SYLVIEENNE: (Rushes over to him.) Oh, Dan, dear, you look pale. I'll get you—

DAN: You don't fool me for a second. You'd love to have this gorgeous stage all to yourself.

SYLVIEENNE: What on earth are you—?

DAN: Germinate, bitch! Ughhh! Ughhh! Girls! I can't stand them. (Makes an audible noise of vomiting.)

SYLVIENNE: (Looking for a sympathetic face in the audience.) Of course, you realize this is no accident.

DAN: Get her out of here! Get her out of here!

SYLVIENNE: (Hurriedly confiding to the audience.) Let me tell you about Dan Leach and how it all started! Originally he's from Dallas. His father was killed in a stampede in the Pecos Panhandle when Dan was just seven. However, it seems that Dan was riding his pinto pony that happened to start the stampede that killed his father and—

DAN: Oh, no, you don't! (Grabs SYLVIENNE, lifts her up, and shoves her offstage.)

SYLVIENNE: (Shouting.) He thinks I'm his incestuous mother and he is full of shame about it.

GEORGE: Dan, you skipped your love scene with Sylvienne.

DAN: Shut up, Birimisa. I know what my next line is. (To audience.) You'll have to forgive me for breaking out of character, ladies and gentlemen, but that young lady is an apprentice with our group who just happens to be more interested in finding herself a man than she is in learning the Chekhovian method of acting. However, what is really bugging her is her last review. She was called "less than adequate" by a critic from *The Village Voice*.

(GEORGE is seated on the edge of the stage. With one hand, he makes the motion of a flower. His heart is not in it.)

SYLVIENNE: (Rushes onstage, her petals quivering.) Dan dear, I want you to—

DAN: I wasn't speaking to you, Vera Hrubá Ralston. (Turns to GEORGE.) Violet?

GEORGE: You still Dan Leach?

DAN: I really don't know.

GEORGE: (Lying flat on the stage.) Show me what your name is.

DAN: What a wonderful idea, Birimisa! (Crouches, hands to his sides. Quickly grows and flowers.) What's my name?

GEORGE: You're not a poppy, right?

DAN: (Sarcastic.) You're so perceptive!

GEORGE: You red?

DAN: It may confuse you since I can't get my center out of my mouth.

GEORGE: You're a purple moon carnation.

DAN: (Undulating.) I'm afraid not.

GEORGE: Lily of the valley?

DAN: Too pure for me.

GEORGE: You begin with an "L"?

DAN: Part of me does.

GEORGE: You have more than one name, correct?

DAN: Ooooh! You're so right, Birimisa.

SYLVIENNE: I know! You're a wild pansy!

DAN: Wilt, weed!

GEORGE: You're a lily? (DAN squeals in delight.) You're a Madonna lily!

DAN: Honey, that was my persona ten years ago.

SYLVIEENNE: Heavens to Betsy! You're an Easter lily!

DAN: Sizzle, bitch!

SYLVIEENNE: Aren't we the sweetest! (Claps her hands.) You want me to call you Easter?

DAN: Up your vinyl vagina! (Flirting with GEORGE.) You can call me Easter, Birimisa!

GEORGE: (A violet. His hands move sensually toward DAN.) How are you, Easter baby?

DAN: My petals are quivering.

(GEORGE and DAN are almost touching. SYLVIEENNE gets between them. DAN gives her a dirty look.)

DAN: Ooooh! Such a putrid purple. Honey, you're not going to make out looking like that. Look at me! (In all his glory as Nellie White Easter Lily.) I'm clear, cool—an eggshell white, and yes—so—so—beautiful!

SYLVIEENNE: You're a screaming faggot hiding behind the arts.

DAN: Ooooh! Do I detect a touch of jealous green in your stamen? You, my dear, are an artificial flower. Non-organic. You don't belong in the same ground with George and me.

SYLVIEENNE: (Angry.) You are—are—(At a loss for words.)

DAN: (Talking to audience.) There was a time when having a hot vulva was enough. Those days are gone forever.

SYLVIEENNE: (Losing control completely.) You've always had the hots for George!

GEORGE, DAN: For Violet!

SYLVIEENNE: Aw, fuck it! (Exits.)

DAN: Dear me, such Anglo-Saxon smuttiness. (Looks at GEORGE sexily.) Violet?

GEORGE: (Undulating toward DAN—sexual—secretive.) Yes, Easter baby?

DAN: Mmmm—Do you mind if I call you "Daddy," Violet? Yes, *Daddy Violet*!

(DAN is kneeling. GEORGE is standing, legs spread wide, and is moving his abdomen back and forth. His eyes are closed.)

GEORGE: No, baby, I don't mind! (He is moving his pelvis as if fucking the air.)

DAN: Oh, *Daddy Violet*, your fibrous stamen turns me on. It flames me. It makes my chlorophyll boil. Your magenta petals are like an ocean on a moonlit night.

GEORGE: Don't stop, babe!

DAN: May I, *Daddy Violet*?

GEORGE: May you—what?

DAN: May I cultivate your root?

GEORGE: (Grabs his crotch.) The root of heaven.

(SYLVIEENNE is watching the scene.)

SYLVIEENNE: (Screaming.) The root of heaven? How sick can you get?

GEORGE: (Startled out of his fantasy, pushes SYLVIEENNE offstage.) Get back in your hole.

SYLVIEENNE: You're as sick as he is.

GEORGE: (Pushes her offstage a second time.) As you get older you'll realize how sick you really are.

SYLVIEENNE: I'm tired of being a seed.

DAN: (Smiles at SYLVIEENNE.) Sweetie bun, stay nice and warm in the good earth.

SYLVIEENNE: (Turning to DAN.) But I thought that you—all those dreadful things you said. I—

DAN: I'm bipolar, toots!

SYLVIEENNE: Oh dear, is your center still in your mouth?

DAN: My center is still in my mouth.

SYLVIEENNE: I wasn't blaming you. I was blaming your center—you know—calling me all those horrible names. Uh—Vera Hruba, uh—something or other?

DAN: Vera Hruba Ralston. An actress in the last century who just happened to be married to the owner of Republic Studios, Herbert J. Yates. She got all the starring roles in his B pictures. I adored her in *Angel of the Amazon*.

SYLVIEENNE: You're dreadfully confusing.

DAN: Nothing personal, Violet. As you grow, you will learn to bypass the rocks and the scraggly weeds.

SYLVIEENNE: Are you saying that your center is in your mouth—permanently?

DAN: Until I can change it organically.

SYLVIEENNE: Oh?

DAN: I don't believe in chemical fertilizers.

SYLVIEENNE: (Flutters her petals.) Am I really an artificial violet?

DAN: Hyperbole, my dear Violet. I must say that you do have a degree of organic life in your roots. I mean—wouldn't you say it would be rather difficult to grow on the side of a mountain overlooking the—(Looks over the edge of the platform.) The fog has lifted. (Points.) The Tigris River, and—and a canal over there, and—(Pause.) I can—oh—I can—Jesus Christ, I—

SYLVIEENNE: What? What is it?

DAN: (Pulls back from edge of platform. Utter terror, crawling across the stage, moaning and crying.) I saw—I—

SYLVIEENNE: You saw—?

DAN: (Clutching his body.) I feel so—so empty! Empty! I—

SYLVIEENNE: You've been working too hard. Doing your famous turkey must be a terrible emotional strain.

DAN: (Screaming.) It's gone! It's gone!

SYLVIEENNE: What's gone? What?

DAN: My center. Where? Where the fuck is it? (Feels his chest, his knees, his forehead—and then sticks two fingers in his mouth.)

SYLVIEENNE: It's in your heart!

(DAN puts his hand on his heart—pounds his chest and then shakes his head.)

GEORGE: (Runs downstage.) I'll bet it's in your balls!

DAN: (Reaches between his legs.) I don't have any!

GEORGE: Concentrate! Put your—

DAN: (Feverishly running his hands over his body.) Where the fuck is my center?

GEORGE: It's got to be somewhere. It's only logical according to the teachings of Michael Chekhov!

DAN: I know—I know—after all these years of studying the Chekhovian method of acting, I'm a miserable failure.

SYLVIEENNE: Listen to me, Easter!

DAN: What?

SYLVIEENNE: (Screaming at the top of her lungs.) Easter! Easter lily!

DAN: What on earth are you talking about?

SYLVIEENNE: You're clear, cool, and an eggshell white. You're Easter lily!

DAN: I am?

SYLVIEENNE: Yes! Yes! Yes!

GEORGE: Now don't panic. Let me think! (Holding DAN.) Dan?

DAN: Who?

GEORGE: Dan Leach! Dan Leach!

DAN: If only I can find my center. Dear God! Where? Where?

SYLVIEENNE: (Shouting.) You've got to find your center.

DAN: How many times do I have to—

SYLVIEENNE: Without you as a role model—a living example of the creative artist, I—

DAN: I—I—(Pounding on the floor of the stage.) I—I can't find it!

SYLVIEENNE: Oh my God! How could you—?

(DAN is bent over. SYLVIEENNE rushes upstage—she is beating him on the back with her fists.)

SYLVIEENNE: How could you do this to me? How could you? (Jumps up.) My center is in my heart! My name is Violet. I am blooming on the side of a mountain very high. I have broken through the rock-encrusted earth and I've pushed through the scraggly weeds and now I can feel the afternoon sun opening me up, and below—(Rushes to the edge of the platform.) below—below—

GEORGE: What—what?

SYLVIEENNE: The fog has lifted—it is no longer a solid blanket hiding the—I can see the valley below—below—(Horror.) Dear God!

DAN: (Jumps up and moves to the edge of the platform.) What? What?

SYLVIEENNE: Iraq!

DAN: (Absolute horror.) Iraq?

SYLVIEENNE: (Pointing.) Over there—an armored Humvee going up in flames! An American soldier—he jumps out of the burning vehicle. Dear God, one of his arms is missing. Blood—blood gushing out of the stump.

(SYLVIEENNE puts her hands over her ears as she looks at the sky. The terrifying sound of a helicopter.)

SYLVIEENNE: (Screaming over the roar of the helicopter.) A helicopter is coming to the rescue!

DAN: (Terrified.) On the riverbank, six American soldiers. They surround a Muslim family. They point their AK-47s at the father—the mother with a baby in her arms and—and—a beautiful young girl—she hides behind her father.

SYLVIEENNE: She's only a child—maybe thirteen.

DAN: This soldier—a tub of lard—he's pulling down his fatigues. He's taking out his—

SYLVIEENNE: He's moving toward the girl. He's ripping at her abaya.

GEORGE: Look at the tits on that kid! Better than the bitches on the internet. He's got her legs over his shoulders and—and he's—slam, bam, thank you, ma'am! (We hear fifteen gunshots. The sound is magnified.)

SYLVIEENNE: (Long pause of horror.) The family is sprawled—sprawled in the sand. Motionless. Dead? The mother with her baby in her arms. (Pause.) The baby is—

(We hear the piercing scream of the baby.)

SYLVIEENNE: (Sniffs.) What? What? What is that smell? The fat soldier is—Dear God—he's pouring the kerosene. He lights a match. He—he—(Surveys the family.) The family is going up in flames. Charred, burned, roasted. (Pinches her nose.) I can smell them burning—burning flesh. He picks up a concrete slab and bashes in the head of the screaming girl.

(SYLVIEENNE runs upstage. GEORGE grabs SYLVIEENNE and drags her to the edge of the platform. She fights him—clawing at him.)

GEORGE: Let go of your sado-masochistic fantasy.

SYLVIEENNE: Get away from me. Get—

GEORGE: (Grabs SYLVIEENNE by the neck and forces her to look over the edge of the platform.) That is not Iraq!

SYLVIEENNE: You're crazy!

GEORGE: Salinas Valley! Salinas Valley!

SYLVIEENNE: What are you—?

GEORGE: (Tightens his grip on her neck.) Salinas Valley! Salinas Valley! Salinas Valley! Salinas Valley! Salinas Valley!

SYLVIEENNE: (Whispers.) Did you—?

GEORGE: Salinas Valley!

SYLVIEENNE: Sal—?

GEORGE: Fuckin' Salinas Valley!

SYLVIEENNE: Sal—Salinas Valley?

GEORGE: (A big grin.) Now you're getting it. Sal—Sal—?

GEORGE, SYLVIEENNE: Salinas Valley! Salinas Valley! Salinas Valley!

(GEORGE runs over to DAN, who is bent over in the fetal position. GEORGE drags him to the edge of the platform.)

GEORGE: Salinas Valley! Salinas Valley! Salinas Valley!

DAN: Huh?

GEORGE: (Twists DAN's arm.) Salinas Valley!

DAN: Uh—(Whispers.) Salinas Valley.

GEORGE: Can't hear you! (Twists DAN's arm some more.)

DAN: Oooow!

GEORGE: Louder!

DAN: Sal—Sal—

GEORGE: (Shouting.) Salinas Valley!

DAN: (Shouting.) Salinas Valley!

GEORGE: All together now!

ALL THREE: (Shouting.) Salinas Valley! Salinas Valley! Salinas Valley!

GEORGE: Now you're getting the truth—the American truth.

DAN: (Turns into a beautiful violet.) My center has returned.

SYLVIENCE: Is it you-know-where?

DAN: It's in my heart.

SYLVIENCE: Life is wonderful!

GEORGE: (Hugging SYLVIENCE.) We are really growing!

DAN: (Radiant.) I will join the two of you on the side of the mountain very high.

(GEORGE and SYLVIENCE turn into violets. Their hands are undulating over their heads. They are happy violets.)

SYLVIENCE: (To DAN.) Such a deep purple! Such an organic violet!

DAN: Thank you, Violet!

SYLVIENCE: My mind—that nightmare—looking down into the—(Starts to look over the edge of the platform. GEORGE quickly pulls her back.)

DAN: We are growing in organic fertilizer. And remember, pain is always involved with growth. And let us be honest, there is nothing worse than petal pain.

ALL THREE: (Holding hands and singing.) We are blooming on the side of a mountain very high. We have broken through the rock-encrusted earth and we've pushed through the scraggly weeds. (They form a circle and start to dance. They go faster and faster in a nervous hysteria.) Violet! Violet! Vi-o-let! We can feel the morning sun opening us up, and below the fog is a solid blanket hiding the—(They stop dead in their tracks—they are looking over the edge of the platform.)

GEORGE: (Sternly.) Yes? (Pause.) Yes?

(For a moment they are motionless.)

DAN: (In a booming voice.) Salinas Valley!

SYLVIENCE: (Looks over the edge of the platform.) Salinas Valley?

ALL THREE: (Singing.) Violet! Violet! Vio—Vio—Violet!

DAN: The sun is on us!

SYLVIEENNE: (Looking down into the valley.) The Salinas Valley! Steinbeck country!

GEORGE: The mission bells are echoing across the verdant valley.

DAN: The morning dew is on the neat rows of lettuce stretching to the horizon—
geometrically patterned.

SYLVIEENNE: The acorns, silver-green and flecked with white, on the tall, slender
eucalyptus trees.

GEORGE: (Gets between them. They have their arms around each other.) A truck
full of immigrants—they're wearing brightly colored ponchos and singing of
their homeland.

DAN: Golden California poppies covering the hillside.

SYLVIEENNE: Arcadia!

GEORGE: Paradise!

DAN: Eden!

SYLVIEENNE: (To GEORGE.) Please, before anything else happens that—

GEORGE: George Birimisa.

SYLVIEENNE: Sylvienne Strauss.

DAN: Dan Leach.

(They hold hands and bow, taking their curtain calls.)

CURTAIN



June Adams as Ilsa in the Playbox production of *Mr. Jello*, 1968.

Photo by Joseph Di Giorgio

MISTER JELLO

(1968)

A Play in One Long Act with a Few Songs

Mister Jello was first produced at the Playbox, 94 St. Mark's Place in New York City, on a double bill with Nancy Henderson's *Medusa of 47th Street*, on March 20, 1968, under the skillful direction of Sully Boyar, featuring the following cast:

MISS APPLE..... Leah Larson
QUEEN MARY..... Claude Barbazon
FAVONIUS Mark Graham
ILSA..... June Adams
MISTER JELLO Gene Elman

In his review in *Show Business*, Frank Lee Wilde wrote concerning *Mister Jello*: "It's a prime example of the experimental play that manipulates time, place and character to illustrate the ambiguity of reality. The various characters demonstrate the shortcomings of their particular personalities in dealing with reality."

As a coda of his own, Mr. Wilde appended the following observation to his review: "For some reason there was a long coda based on *Death of a Salesman* which had everyone restless before it ended. Its relation to the main body of the play was not clear." Perhaps Linda Loman's final line in the Miller work had escaped Mr. Wilde: "We're free," she says while standing in the rain at the site of Willy's grave, "We're free."

A revival of the production at the Arts Lab in October of that year impressed the trustees of the Rockefeller Foundation to the extent that they awarded George Birimisa a grant, the first such grant ever made to an openly gay playwright, to supervise rehearsals of the Wherehouse Company production of *Mister Jello*, directed by Nancy Meckler, which opened in London on February 24, 1969. The cast consisted of Beth Porter as the Social Scientist, Maurice Colbourne as the Drag Queen, Stephen Rea as the Young Man, Dinah Stabb as the Prostitute, and Tony Sibbald as Mister Jello.

CHARACTERS:

MISS APPLE, 20s	Very angry. Thirty pounds overweight.
QUEEN MARY, 41	Male. Arch. Sophisticated.
FAVONIUS, 22	He is named after the gentle west wind.
ILSA, 25	Very good at what she does.
MISTER JELLO, 45	A pillar of the community. Chubby.
THE TIME:	1968.
THE SET:	A flat upstage center—nothing else.

(Then the magnified sound of an alarm clock going off. Lights. MISS APPLE enters, running down center aisle. She is wearing a Mao jacket, cut with stand-up collar and buttoned up to the neck, and black slacks. She is bundled up, dressed for freezing weather, wearing a heavy scarf and gloves. Her hair is pulled back in a ponytail. She is carrying a milk crate in one hand and a revolver in the other. Places the milk crate stage left and puts the revolver in it. Takes an extra-large alarm clock from the crate and smashes down the alarm. Sudden silence. She is shivering from the cold. Sits on the milk crate. She is panting heavily, trying to regain her composure. Puts the alarm clock on the floor. Gets notebook from box. Picks up clock and checks the time.)

MISS APPLE: (Writes.) Seven thirty-one A.M. Was attacked by a Negro inhabitant of Bedford-Stuyvesant. Did not panic because of—

(MISS APPLE takes revolver from milk crate, kisses it, and puts it back in the milk crate. Checks imaginary thermometer on the wall.)

MISS APPLE: Twelve degrees in this cold-water flat.

(MISS APPLE stamps out an imaginary cockroach. Gets Kleenex from crate and carefully picks up the roach, making a face and looking in the other direction. Puts the Kleenex in crate. Sits and writes in notebook.)

MISS APPLE: Cockroach-infested—human feces in hallway! Graffiti on walls—what's this—"LBJ SUCKS COCK"—? Rats in walls. A foot-long rat can squeeze through a hole a quarter of an inch in diameter.

(MISS APPLE moves downstage—looks over the edge of the stage.)

MISS APPLE: View from cold-water flat—ugh! Let's see. Beer cans—excrement and—how many? (Counts.) Twenty-two felines—motionless. A dead canine with its intestines crawling with maggots. What is—? A shriveled-up balloon? It's—yuk! Reflects diet, recreational and sexual activities, as well as basic underlying hostility.

(MISS APPLE gets newspaper from milk crate and reads.)

MISS APPLE: (Reading from newspaper.) "Mohammed Mossadegh, the democratically elected prime minister of Iran, is dead at the age of eighty-five while under house arrest. He was removed from power in 1953 by pro-monarchy forces in a coup led by British and U.S. intelligence agencies." (Pause.) What's this? (Reading headline from newspaper.) The Fate of Elderly Queens? (Quoting from memory.) "A rampart of a ship, long as a street and lofty as a tower, ready to glide in thunder from the slip and sheer the sea with majesty of—"

(QUEEN MARY enters stage left. He is dressed in a conservative Sixties double-breasted suit and a wide tie. He is carrying two milk crates.)

QUEEN MARY: How beautifully quaint.

MISS APPLE: How dare you burst into this apartment without knocking?

QUEEN MARY: John Masfield, Poet Laureate of Great Britain. Written to celebrate the launching of the Queen Mary in 1936. (Shouts offstage right.) Antoine, how much time do I have? Only a half hour? You may have to hold the curtain.

(QUEEN MARY sits center stage on milk crate. Uses second milk crate as a vanity. Takes mirror from the milk crate—looks at himself.)

QUEEN MARY: Oh dear. Time marches on!

(QUEEN MARY takes off coat and folds it neatly. Puts on a smock, then takes out make-up kit from milk crate. Spreads cold cream on his face. Puts a nylon stocking over his hair. MISS APPLE is watching intently.)

MISS APPLE: Who are you?

QUEEN MARY: I am not as large as Queen Mary, but I was also launched in 1936.

MISS APPLE: (Writing furiously.) Seven thirty-eight A.M. Unidentified, uh—male? Manifests terror of women by his neurotic behavior.

QUEEN MARY: My mother named me after her.

MISS APPLE: I beg your pardon?

QUEEN MARY: Queen Mary, Mary.

(QUEEN MARY gets large Oriental fan from box. Fans himself—also under his armpits. He is in his own world. The temperature in his reality is in the 90s.)

QUEEN MARY: Utterly, terrifyingly, stifling. I know—it's not the heat—it's the humidity.

MISS APPLE: Are you insane? It's freezing.

(MISS APPLE watches as QUEEN MARY puts on eyeliner.)

MISS APPLE: Oh! Do you really think you're Queen Mary?

QUEEN MARY: Darling, at least this year—

MISS APPLE: Seven forty-two A.M. So-called "Queen Mary" is the last gasp of a corrupt capitalist society.

QUEEN MARY: My act is nostalgia. I am nostalgia. (Stands up and circles around MISS APPLE as he sings. Song: "A-Huggin' and A-Chalkin'," as recorded by Hoagy Carmichael.)

"Oh, gee, but ain't it grand to have a gal so big and fat

That when you go to hug her, you don't know where you're at

You have to take a piece of chalk in your hand

And hug a ways and chalk a mark to see where you began

One day I was a-huggin' and a-chalkin' and a-chalkin' and a-huggin' away

When I met another fella with some chalk in his hand

A-comin' around the other way over the mountain

A-comin' around the other way

Nobody ever said I'm weak

My bones don't ache, my joints don't creak

But I grow pale and I get limp

Every time I see my, uh—baby blimp.”

MISS APPLE: You are despicable. You are—

QUEEN MARY: (Sits and examines his face in the mirror.) This gorgeous theater and no air conditioning. Well—that's Gotham!

MISS APPLE: Queen Mary, it's time some reality came into your degenerate world.

QUEEN MARY: (Raises his hands.) De-gen-er-ate! Yes! Yes! Yes!

MISS APPLE: You are in Bedford-Stuyvesant.

QUEEN MARY: Bedford Sty? Oh, those primates—they really know how! (Does a bump.) How! How!

MISS APPLE: Do you realize that the mortality rate of Negro infants born here in Bedford-Stuyvesant compared to the middle class of Shaker Heights in Cleveland is—

QUEEN MARY: I see you brought your soapbox.

MISS APPLE: It's a milk crate.

QUEEN MARY: If you think so.

MISS APPLE: If it weren't so freezing cold in here, I'd—

QUEEN MARY: You must be joshing. It's in the—(Pulls out thermometer.) Yes, exactly ninety-four degrees, my dear.

(QUEEN MARY has wiped the cold cream from his face. Now he is powdering his face with a huge pink powder puff. Takes silk stockings from the milk crate. Kicks off his loafers and starts to put on the silk stockings.)

QUEEN MARY: Only pure silk against my lovely legs.

MISS APPLE: (Shakes her head in disgust. Picks up the paper and reads.) “Sandy Koufax, having retired and become—”

QUEEN MARY: I do have a thing for Jewish boys—such male chauvinists—they turn me on.

MISS APPLE: You are a racist. You—

QUEEN MARY: Of course, my dear. We live in a racist country.

MISS APPLE: You admit that—?

QUEEN MARY: But, my dear, get this straight. I am not a practicing homosexual. Write it down, sweetie!

MISS APPLE: (Puzzled.) You are not an overt deviate?

QUEEN MARY: That is correct, my dear.

MISS APPLE: Then how can you be a homosexual, if you don't have sex with men?

QUEEN MARY: Fantasy, my dear, fantasy!

MISS APPLE: But—but—how can you—?

QUEEN MARY: Being gay is not what you do. It's what you feel. It's what you are.

MISS APPLE: (Agitated.) That is not scientific. It—

QUEEN MARY: (Fans himself and sings: "It's a Hot Night in Alaska," written by Jule Stein with lyrics by Leo Robin.) "It's a hot night in Alaska when Sally does her Bali-Bali dance." (Applies lipstick.)

MISS APPLE: Dialectical materialism is scientific. After I read *Das Kapital* and *Anti-Duhring*, I realized that Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* was nothing more than an apology for the virus of imperialism, and that—

QUEEN MARY: (Continues to sing.) "The miners from the hills throw hundred dollar bills—"

MISS APPLE: The American people have the right to vote for the party that will oppress them. They—

QUEEN MARY: (Shaking his butt and singing.) "When Sally does her Bali-Bali dance!"

MISS APPLE: There is some hope. We now have a poet ruling one-fourth of the population of the world—Mao Tse-Tung.

QUEEN MARY: (Moves stage right.) Twenty minutes, Antoine? Oh dear. What? Talk to the management. Darling, I gave up being afraid of the Mafia years ago. Did I ever tell you about my passionate affair with Al Capone? (Crosses to his vanity and begins to paint his nails.)

(FAVONIUS enters. A psychedelic T-shirt, blue jeans, very long hair. He is barefoot. He is carrying a clothes tree painted in rainbow colors.)

MISS APPLE: Did you come out of the woodwork?

QUEEN MARY: Such gorgeous hair, let me style it. Tight corkscrew curls on your forehead, reflecting an African influence, and springy waves or light swirl highlights. Yes! Yes! Yes! Heaven! You will be more devastating than you already are!

FAVONIUS: Far fuckin' out!

(FAVONIUS blows up a balloon, which he attaches to his tree.)

MISS APPLE: (Looks at FAVONIUS with disgust. Writes in notebook.) Seven fifty-two. Must remain objective.

QUEEN MARY: Ah, yes. Bloody Queen Mary Tudor. What a voice—would put Sarah Bernhardt to shame. She used the Delsarte method of acting. (Puts hand to forehead, palm outward, and scrunches up his face in sorrow.)

MISS APPLE: John Dewey said that no American could call himself educated until he understood Henry George's single tax.

QUEEN MARY: Poor Queen Mary. She never had any children, and she got her jollies by having three hundred of her subjects burned at the stake for heresy.

MISS APPLE: "Private ownership of land has no more foundation in morality than private ownership of air and sunlight."

FAVONIUS: (Opens his eyes.) That's bitchin'! Outta sight!

MISS APPLE: I beg your pardon?

FAVONIUS: Boss, really boss!

MISS APPLE: (Puzzled.) That is a quote from economist Henry George.

FAVONIUS: A cool cat.

MISS APPLE: If it hadn't been for Henry George, I never would have discovered Marx.

FAVONIUS: I wiggled out on them in Duck Soup.

MISS APPLE: I presume you believe in God?

QUEEN MARY: Remember, Miss Bedford Sty. Religion is the opiate of the masses.

MISS APPLE: Do you realize Krishna and Buddha are responsible for millions of starving people?

FAVONIUS: I dig Ramana Maharshi.

MISS APPLE: Ramana what?

FAVONIUS: "You are the self now, and can never be anything else. Throw your troubles to the wind. Turn within and find peace."

MISS APPLE: Give me a break.

FAVONIUS: He will if you hang in there.

MISS APPLE: Who is he?

FAVONIUS: Buddha, Muhammad, Jesus—

QUEEN MARY: (Takes blonde wig from milk crate.) Actually, if they really showed Jesus with all that Negro blood in him—well—I could—mmmm. (Tries on the wig.)

MISS APPLE: Literally millions of people have been slaughtered in the name of Jesus Christ.

FAVONIUS: His trip was love.

MISS APPLE: You fool. Catholicism and capitalism go hand in hand. They give the rationale for the slaughter of how many? A hundred thousand women and children in Vietnam. Thank God I'm an atheist.

FAVONIUS: You're missing out on your own beauty!

MISS APPLE: (Shocked.) You—you think I'm—I'm beautiful?

FAVONIUS: I didn't say that.

MISS APPLE: What—what are you—?

FAVONIUS: You're not copping to the beauty inside you. You're too heavy.

MISS APPLE: (Furious.) Heavy? Heavy? How dare you—

FAVONIUS: I meant sad.

MISS APPLE: Sad?

(FAVONIUS nods his head.)

MISS APPLE: (Livid.) Get out of my apartment.

FAVONIUS: (Looks around.) Far out!

MISS APPLE: Where do you think you are?

FAVONIUS: The East Village—(Picks up his tree.)

MISS APPLE: You are a junkie!

FAVONIUS: I got outta that bag when I was sixteen.

MISS APPLE: Wake up to reality. You are in the slum of all slums—Bedford-Stuyvesant.

FAVONIUS: You have your world. I have mine.

MISS APPLE: You're with the Department of Parks?

FAVONIUS: Just looking for a place to plant my tree.

MISS APPLE: In the middle of my apartment?

FAVONIUS: Saint Mark's Place.

MISS APPLE: There are already over two million trees in New York City. (Sits on her milk crate and writes.) Nine twelve A.M. Longhaired young man broke into my apartment carrying a clothes tree painted various garish colors, and he is attaching balloons to it.

FAVONIUS: (Crosses to QUEEN MARY.) Hey, man, what's happenin'?

QUEEN MARY: How dare you call me a man?

FAVONIUS: Okay, Miss. You're a trip and then some!

QUEEN MARY: I'm much more than that, darling.

FAVONIUS: You're a Scorpio?

QUEEN MARY: (Licks his lips à la Marilyn Monroe.) You think I'm excruciatingly sexy?

FAVONIUS: Pisces! You are not a candy-ass. (Moves closer. Studies QUEEN MARY's face.) You're intuitive. Tonight your powers of perception are heightened. Your friends may call you a dreamer—a weaver of fantasies, but you know you're in touch with what really matters—your inner self—your connection to your God.

QUEEN MARY: Please, my dear. I know that Pisces is the hellhole of the zodiac.

FAVONIUS: Only if you want it to be.

MISS APPLE: (Writing in notebook.) Nine fourteen A.M. Decadent bourgeois faction in black ghetto. Suspicion of—

FAVONIUS: Would you care for a rose, Miss?

QUEEN MARY: Oh! I absolutely adore roses.

FAVONIUS: (Lowers his head.) Help yourself.

(QUEEN MARY takes imaginary rose from FAVONIUS's head and smells it. FAVONIUS acts out the poem as if he were the King in the poem.)

"I went to gather roses and twine them in a ring,

For I would make a posy, a posy for the King.

I got an hundred roses, the loveliest there be,

From the white rose vine and the pink rose bush and from the red rose tree.

But when I took my posy and laid it at His feet

I found He had His roses a million times more sweet.

There was a scarlet blossom upon each foot and hand,

And a great pink rose bloomed from His side for the healing of the land.

Now of this fair and awful King there is marvel told,

That He wears a crown of linked thorns instead of one of gold.

Where there are thorns are roses, and I saw a line of red,

A little wreath of roses around His radiant head.

A red rose is His Sacred Heart, a white rose is His face,
And His breath has turned the barren world to a rich and flowery place.
He is the Rose of Sharon, His gardener am I,
And I shall drink His fragrance in Heaven when I die.”

MISS APPLE: (Identifies the poet.) Joyce Kilmer—that bourgeois Catholic poet.
Almost as bad as his—(Drips hatred as she recites “Trees” by Joyce Kilmer. She acts it out.)

“I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the sweet earth’s flowing breast;
A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;
A tree that may in Summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.” (Laughs uproariously.)

QUEEN MARY: Archaic, middle-class tripe. I adore it.

MISS APPLE: You’re archaic.

QUEEN MARY: (To FAVONIUS.) Sweetie pie, would you care to join me in a martini?

FAVONIUS: A what?

QUEEN MARY: A cocktail made of three parts gin and one part very, very dry
vermouth.

FAVONIUS: Liquor’s not my bag.

(QUEEN MARY takes tiny bottle of gin and a martini glass from milk crate. Pours gin
into the glass, then looks for vermouth but can’t find it. He does find a small
bottle of olives and pops one into the martini glass. Sips his martini.)

QUEEN MARY: Two more martinis and I’ll be ready for my grand entrance. (Moves
stage right—shouts.) Antoine? How much time do I have? (Pause.) Twenty
minutes?

MISS APPLE: (Runs downstage and stamps out an imaginary cockroach.) Young
man? Would you—?

FAVONIUS: Lay it on me, man.

MISS APPLE: (Gets Kleenex from milk crate.) I abhor these filthy—ugh. Please clean
that horror off my floor. (Hands FAVONIUS the Kleenex. FAVONIUS moves
downstage—he starts to pick up the imaginary cockroach.) Are you blind?

FAVONIUS: Sorry, I—

MISS APPLE: (Points to a spot farther downstage.) Over here!

FAVONIUS: (Looks at crushed cockroach.) A bummer. (Looks at MISS APPLE.) Every living creature is holy. (Disposes of Kleenex.)

MISS APPLE: Are you going to give it a funeral? (Gets spray can from milk crate and sprays the spot on the floor.)

QUEEN MARY: Watch it, honey bun! I'm sure it's mace!

MISS APPLE: You—you should be—

QUEEN MARY: Exterminated?

(QUEEN MARY finishes painting his nails. Holds up his hands. Waves them to get them dry.)

QUEEN MARY: (To FAVONIUS.) Please help a lady in distress.

FAVONIUS: What can I—?

QUEEN MARY: My blouse. (Holds his hands above his head. FAVONIUS helps QUEEN MARY take off his shirt.) I have always depended on the kindness of—um—that's too clichéd but—thank you, doll! (Fans under his arms. Moves stage right.) Antoine! I need more time!

FAVONIUS: It's such a beautiful spring day!

MISS APPLE: It's the middle of winter. (Looks at imaginary thermometer.) Thirteen degrees!

FAVONIUS: It's your movie.

(FAVONIUS takes stick of incense from his bag. Sits cross-legged center stage. Lights the incense. Closes his eyes. The lights dim on MISS APPLE and QUEEN MARY. A soft, spiritual light on FAVONIUS. Zen music: "Shin Kyorei" played by Yamaguchi Goro. OFFSTAGE VOICE speaks as FAVONIUS mouths the words.)

OFFSTAGE VOICE: "Enlightenment is like the moon reflected on the water.

The moon does not get wet, nor is the water broken.

Although its light is wide and great,

The moon is reflected even in a puddle an inch wide.

The whole moon and the entire sky

Are reflected in one dewdrop on the grass."

(Lights up. MISS APPLE is sitting on her milk crate. Her arms are pressed against her sides. She is shivering. FAVONIUS takes off his poncho and offers it to MISS APPLE.)

MISS APPLE: No thank you. It's, um—(Pinches her nostrils shut between her thumb and index finger.)

FAVONIUS: (Bends his head to show off his imaginary roses.) Would you like a rosebud?

MISS APPLE: (Puzzled.) Would I—?

FAVONIUS: "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may, old time is still a-flying, and this same flower that smiles today—tomorrow will be dying."

MISS APPLE: I don't see any roses.

QUEEN MARY: Wake up and smell the roses, dearie! (Turns to FAVONIUS.) Would you like to turn me on, flower child?

FAVONIUS: I've got some mind-blowing windowpane.

QUEEN MARY: Windowpane?

FAVONIUS: Pure—no speed.

QUEEN MARY: What is it?

FAVONIUS: L.S.D.

QUEEN MARY: How much does it cost?

FAVONIUS: Have you ever dropped acid?

QUEEN MARY: I'm afraid I'm a virgin.

FAVONIUS: Your first trip is free.

QUEEN MARY: Oh, how lovely.

FAVONIUS: It's a tradition.

QUEEN MARY: I adore tradition.

FAVONIUS: No one pays for their first trip.

QUEEN MARY: I've done everything else at least twice, so I might as well—

MISS APPLE: He's a dealer, stupid. He wants to get you hooked, and then—

FAVONIUS: "There are three kinds of individuals in the world. One speaks words reeking with foul smells, one speaks words of fragrance, one speaks words sweet as honey."

MISS APPLE: The dealer thinks he's a philosopher!

FAVONIUS: Buddha!

MISS APPLE: I beg your pardon?

FAVONIUS: A saying from Buddha. (Takes a piece of foil from his pocket—opens it. Offers it to QUEEN MARY.)

QUEEN MARY: That itsy bitsy thing?

FAVONIUS: It will take you to heaven or to hell, wherever you want to go.

QUEEN MARY: I think heaven would be rather boring. Actually, I do not fear Satan half as much as I fear those who fear him.

FAVONIUS: Wet your finger. (Pantomimes putting acid in his mouth.) There! Lick it.

QUEEN MARY: (Licks his finger, puts acid in his mouth, then sips his martini.) I must say, our devils are never what we expect when we meet them face to face.

MISS APPLE: Ten ten A.M. Queen Mary has unconscious compulsion to commit suicide.

QUEEN MARY: (Sits on milk crate. Picks up old-fashioned, ornate mirror.) I am utterly and absolutely gorgeous. Not a wrinkle, and I was born in 1923.

MISS APPLE: But you said you were born in 1936, when the Queen Mary was launched.

QUEEN MARY: I did, didn't I?

MISS APPLE: You—you—

QUEEN MARY: My life is beautifully, wonderfully empty. I'm a bauble, an empty-headed bauble. That's my charm. That's how I get my men—my beautiful black men with their hate-filled eyes—they're the only real men left.

MISS APPLE: You're so confused. Time, gender! You have no idea who you are or where you are.

QUEEN MARY: I'm backstage at the Club Engagé! (French pronunciation.)

FAVONIUS: (To MISS APPLE.) What's your bag, man?

MISS APPLE: I don't have a—

FAVONIUS: Lay off Queen Mary.

MISS APPLE: He's not a her.

FAVONIUS: (Gestures toward QUEEN MARY.) She just dropped acid.

QUEEN MARY: Thank you, darling child, but Queen Mary can take care of herself.

MISS APPLE: (Looks at clock.) Ten twenty-four A.M. Textbook case. Weak father and over-protective mother. Queen Mary has retreated from overt homosexuality into fantasy world. Degenerate ghetto inhabitant has hallucination that he is a star at the Club Engagé. (Turns to FAVONIUS.) How much do you charge for a lid of grass?

FAVONIUS: I've got some heavy shit—Acapulco gold. You want to turn on with me? Get you off your bumper.

MISS APPLE: How much for heroin?

FAVONIUS: I'm not into that hard shit.

MISS APPLE: Do you realize that over ninety percent of the robberies in Manhattan are committed by junkies, and it's all the fault of dealers like you?

FAVONIUS: The hard shit is not my bag.

MISS APPLE: A likely story.

QUEEN MARY: (Shouting to offstage right.) Antoine, I want a quick run-through of the Irving Berlin number. A pink spot. Please! (All the lights go off except for QUEEN MARY's pink spot. Music up on Irving Berlin's "A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody." QUEEN MARY sings but also acts out the lyrics. Plays this song to the audience.)

"I have an ear for music, and I have an eye for trade.

I like a pretty boy, with each pretty tune that's played.

They go together, like sunny weather goes with the month of May.

I've studied boys and music, so I'm qualified to say—

A pretty boy is like a melody that haunts you night and day.

Just like the strain of a haunting refrain,

He'll start upon a marathon and run around your brain.

You can't escape, he's in your memory. By morning, night and noon.

He will leave you and then come back again.

A pretty boy is just like—"

(QUEEN MARY twists his ankle and almost falls. The music continues as he runs back to his milk crate.) Turn it off, Antoine! (The music stops. QUEEN MARY sags down on his milk crate. He is agitated as he grabs his fan and fans under his arms.)

FAVONIUS: That was groovy. (FAVONIUS crosses to QUEEN MARY. Puts his hand on his shoulder.)

QUEEN MARY: Please—don't touch!

FAVONIUS: I didn't mean to—

QUEEN MARY: (Does the consumptive cough of Greta Garbo in *Camille*.) I want to be alone. (Back to his QUEEN MARY persona.) Actually, I am alone—alone—alone! (Continues to make his transformation from a man to a woman.)

FAVONIUS: Look, you're not wiggin' out from the windowpane, are you?

QUEEN MARY: Child, it hasn't affected me at all. (Pulling at his hair.) I do need another martini. (Quickly fixes another martini.)

FAVONIUS: Now just take your time—

QUEEN MARY: Time! Time! Tick-tock! Tick-tock! (Laughs hysterically.) Did you get a good look at me and that—that—horror over there? (Waves his hand in the direction of MISS APPLE.)

MISS APPLE: (Writing.) Nine fifty-seven—

(From the lobby of the theater, we hear screaming.)

ILSA: (Offstage.) What you need is a foot-long dildo shoved up your flabby ass.

(MISTER JELLO comes running down center aisle carrying his milk crate. He is dressed in a business suit and tie.)

MISTER JELLO: I—I can't take it anymore. I—

(ILSA is right behind him. She is dressed in a skimpy leather bikini and is wearing a leather mask with horns. She is carrying a very large red-leather bag over her shoulder. She is cracking a bullwhip. MISTER JELLO jumps up on the stage. He hides behind QUEEN MARY. ILSA is in front of QUEEN MARY. MISTER JELLO runs one way, ILSA another.)

QUEEN MARY: (To FAVONIUS.) Dear me, I'm hallucinating!

ILSA: You must learn to take orders, slave!

MISTER JELLO: Please, please don't hurt me!

(ILSA grabs MISTER JELLO and shoves him stage left.)

ILSA: Please don't hurt me what, asshole?

MISTER JELLO: Please don't hurt me, Mistress!

(MISTER JELLO is cowering, with the milk crate protecting him. ILSA keeps cracking the whip and MISTER JELLO keeps trying to dodge it.)

ILSA: (Points.) Put the fuckin' milk crate over here!

(MISTER JELLO puts down the milk crate in front of ILSA, who stands on it and cracks the whip. MISTER JELLO runs to the far side of the stage.)

MISTER JELLO: I'm scared!

ILSA: Down on your knees, shithead!

MISTER JELLO: Anything you say, Mistress. (Gets down on his knees.)

ILSA: Over here, you tub of lard!

MISTER JELLO: (Walks on his knees.) I'm coming, Mistress, I'm coming!

ILSA: (Aside to audience.) I wish he would come and get it over with.

(MISTER JELLO crosses to ILSA. He kneels in front of her.)

MISTER JELLO: Here I am.

(ILSA hits him with the bullwhip. MISTER JELLO screams.)

ILSA: Here I am what, slave?

MISTER JELLO: Mistress! Mistress!

(ILSA shoves her boot in his face.)

ILSA: They need a good cleaning—use that fat tongue!

MISTER JELLO: Forgive me, Mistress, but—but you made a big mistake!

ILSA: (Very angry.) A big mistake? A big mistake? (Cracks the bullwhip and MISTER JELLO runs stage left. He hides behind QUEEN MARY.) Ilsa never makes mistakes!

MISTER JELLO: (Peeking out from behind QUEEN MARY.) I'm not your slave. I'm your baby boy.

ILSA: What the fuck are you—?

MISTER JELLO: (Hides behind QUEEN MARY.) I'm one-eight-four, Mistress!

ILSA: You mean you're not one-four-eight?

(MISTER JELLO is suddenly a little boy. Makes a noise as he sucks on his thumb. Skips around ILSA.)

MISTER JELLO: I'm Little Johnny and I'm five years old.

ILSA: Oh, shit!

(ILSA is very efficient as she takes off her mask. Takes a frilly pink apron from her bag and puts it on. MISTER JELLO takes out a yo-yo and works it expertly.)

ILSA: (Resigned.) Okay, Little Johnny. Take off your trousers.

MISTER JELLO: You're such a good Mummy!

ILSA: (Very angry but trying hard to be sweet.) Do what your mother tells you, darling boy.

(MISTER JELLO sticks his thumbs in his ears—wiggles his fingers and sticks out his tongue at ILSA.)

ILSA: You are a naughty, naughty child.

(MISTER JELLO moves to upstage flat. Takes Magic Marker from pocket and draws a picture on the flat of a woman with huge breasts. Draws a vagina with hair around it. Under it he writes "Ilsa." Skips downstage. Takes out a slingshot, aims it at the vagina, and fires.)

MISTER JELLO: Bull's eye!

ILSA: You are bad, bad, bad!

MISTER JELLO: I hit my Mummy in the cunt! (Jumps up and down.) It's—C-U-N-T! Cunt! Cunt! Cunt! Cunt! Cunt! Cunt! Cunt!

ILSA: I'm going to wash out your mouth with soap.

MISTER JELLO: Cunt! Cunt! Cunt!

ILSA: Give me the slingshot, Johnny.

MISTER JELLO: (Hands the slingshot to ILSA.) I don't mean to be so bad—I just can't help it.

FAVONIUS: (Crosses to ILSA—looks her up and down.) I dig your threads.

ILSA: These are my working clothes.

FAVONIUS: Oh! Would you like a balloon?

ILSA: Who the fuck are you?

FAVONIUS: I'm Favonius.

ILSA: What kind of a fuckin' name is that?

FAVONIUS: I was named after the Roman god of the gentle western wind, the herald of spring.

ILSA: You got to be kidding!

FAVONIUS: I'm the protector of flowers and plants.

ILSA: How old are you?

FAVONIUS: Twenty-two.

ILSA: I thought you were going to say you were five.

FAVONIUS: You sure you don't want a balloon?

ILSA: I've got to take care of business. I'll be with you as soon as I finish with my, uh—(Sarcastic.) my Little Johnny. (Turns to MISTER JELLO.) Sweetie! Get out of those fuckin'—(Puts her hand over her mouth.) I mean—take off your trousers, my little honeycums!

MISTER JELLO: I can't get them off, Mummy.

FAVONIUS: (Gets between ILSA and MISTER JELLO.) Hey, sonny, I've got something for you to play with!

MISTER JELLO: (Suddenly MISTER JELLO again.) What in hell do you want?

FAVONIUS: (Holds up balloon.) You want me to blow it up for you?

MISTER JELLO: (Clenches his fists.) Get away from me, you Commie prick!

(FAVONIUS hold up his index and middle finger in the sign of peace.)

MISTER JELLO: (Gives FAVONIUS the middle finger.) Pansies all over the place.

FAVONIUS: I've got some righteous grass.

MISTER JELLO: Take a bath. You stink!

FAVONIUS: It will mellow you out, man.

MISTER JELLO: (Back to being Little Johnny.) Mummy, get that faggot away from me.

ILSA: That faggot?

(ILSA rushes over to MISTER JELLO. Unbuckles his belt. Gives him a shove and he falls down. Pulls off his pants.)

MISTER JELLO: Oh, Mummy, Mummy. You—

ILSA: (Touches his underwear.) You did number one again!

MISTER JELLO: I got so excited—

ILSA: You're six years old, and you're—

MISTER JELLO: Five, Mummy!

ILSA: And you're still wetting yourself. Shame! Shame on you!

MISTER JELLO: I didn't mean to, Mummy, I love you so much. I—

ILSA: (Reverts to her "Mistress" role.) If you don't shut the fuck up I'm going to skin you alive and make a lampshade out of you!

MISTER JELLO: But my Mummy don' talk like that. She—

ILSA: Sorry. I got carried away.

MISTER JELLO: (Sits up.) How much do you love me, Mummy?

ILSA: Oh, no, not that old routine!

MISTER JELLO: (Reverts to MISTER JELLO.) Yes, that one, bitch!

ILSA: (Shakes her head in disgust.) Okay. (Goes into the routine but can't keep the anger out of her voice.) You don't love your Mummy.

MISTER JELLO: I do! I do! (Jumps up and down.) Oh, yes I do!

ILSA: (Holds her hands six inches apart.) How much do you love her?

MISTER JELLO: (Continues to jump up and down.) Much more than that, Mummy!

ILSA: (Holds her hands as far apart as she can.) That much?

MISTER JELLO: More than that, Mummy. With all my heart and soul.

(MISTER JELLO gets ILSA in a bear hug. Kisses her with a loud smacking noise. Pulls down her bra and starts sucking on her breast. ILSA pushes him away.)

ILSA: You are a pervert, Little Johnny.

MISTER JELLO: I'm a good boy! A good boy!

(MISTER JELLO takes a large rubber spider from his pocket and throws it at ILSA. She screams. MISTER JELLO skips downstage, laughing.)

ILSA: Fuckin' degenerate! (MISTER JELLO takes a skip rope from his pocket and begins to jump rope. He is almost as good as a prizefighter.) How old did you say you were?

MISTER JELLO: (Reverts to MISTER JELLO.) For the money I'm paying you—you should know!

ILSA: I forgot to bring my files.

MISTER JELLO: (Reverts to Little Johnny.) I'm five years old, and I—

(MISTER JELLO gets water pistol from pocket and squirts ILSA with it.)

ILSA: You fucker! (Takes the water pistol away from him.) I'll kill you—you big fat slob.

MISTER JELLO: You don't let me have any fun!

ILSA: Over my knee!

MISTER JELLO: Mummy, please don't hurt your Little Johnny!

(ILSA takes ping-pong paddle from her bag.)

ILSA: (Viciously.) This is going to hurt me more than it's going to hurt you.

QUEEN MARY: All that Jello—quivering and quivering.

(MISTER JELLO grabs the ping-pong paddle from ILSA. Puts it in his jacket pocket. Pulls down his underwear and moons ILSA.)

MISTER JELLO: I'm going to do number two!

ILSA: That costs twenty dollars more.

MISTER JELLO: I'm your Little Johnny and I'm only five years old.

ILSA: Let's get this over with.

(ILSA sits on box. MISTER JELLO lies on her lap. She pulls down his underwear and gives him five solid whacks with her open hand. He cries. Then she shoves him off her lap and looks at her watch.)

ILSA: Your time is up, *Mister Jello*! It's four o'clock.

MISS APPLE: Ten nineteen A.M. Eastern Standard Time.

QUEEN MARY: It's the witching hour. I go on in fifteen minutes.

MISTER JELLO: It's only five minutes to four.

ILSA: I say it's four o'clock, and it's four o'clock.

QUEEN MARY: Morning, noon, or night?

MISS APPLE: Get out of my apartment—all of you! You're driving me crazy!

MISTER JELLO: (Looks at his watch.) Mummy, we still have three minutes and—

ILSA: I've had it with you. Give me my fuckin' money! (Holds out her hand. MISTER JELLO takes bills from his pants pocket and hands them to her.)

MISTER JELLO: You're a lousy mother anyway.

QUEEN MARY: The mothers of America are blamed for everything.

MISTER JELLO: (Crosses to MISS APPLE.) Good afternoon, young lady.

MISS APPLE: (Checks her alarm clock.) It is now ten thirty-two A.M.

MISTER JELLO: Ah, yes, a beautiful morning, sweetheart.

MISS APPLE: (Coldly.) Miss Candace Apple!

MISTER JELLO: Have you been working in this bordello very long?

MISS APPLE: I beg your pardon, sir?

MISTER JELLO: This sporting house.

MISS APPLE: I'm a social scientist. I—

MISTER JELLO: Would you be interested in being my Mummy for half an hour?

MISS APPLE: What on earth are you—?

MISTER JELLO: I say, "Mummy—Mummy, my name is Johnny and I wee-wee in my underwear," and—

MISS APPLE: Get away from me, you degenerate! (Moves away from MISTER JELLO. Sits on her milk crate. Writes in her notebook.) Eleven fifty-eight A.M. A prostitute in Bedford-Stuyvesant performs sado-masochistic practices.

MISTER JELLO: (Crosses to MISS APPLE.) You want me to help you with your homework?

MISS APPLE: Extensive wardrobe is necessary.

MISTER JELLO: Let me see your tits, Mummy! (MISS APPLE jumps up and slaps him.) I bet you got a juicy pussy. (Tries to embrace her.)

MISS APPLE: (Grabs her gun and points it at him.) One more step, and—
(MISTER JELLO takes the step. Bites into the gun.)

MISTER JELLO: I love licorice!

MISS APPLE: You belong in an institution for the criminally insane!

MISTER JELLO: (Licks his lips.) Yummy! Yummy! Licorice!

FAVONIUS: (To MISS APPLE.) Keep a morning glory in your heart and perhaps a hummingbird will come.

MISS APPLE: (Writing furiously.) Twelve oh-three P.M. The platitudes of the hippie generation. *Mister Jello* is psychotic and Favonius is lost in a mythical fantasy of sylvan beauty.

QUEEN MARY: Hang on to your precious jewels, Favonius, it's gonna be a bumpy—oops! (Puts his hand over his mouth.) There I go—another cliché.

FAVONIUS: Are you getting a rush yet?

QUEEN MARY: A what, darling?

FAVONIUS: The windowpane is heavy shit.

QUEEN MARY: You are remarkably innocent, my dear.

FAVONIUS: I am?

QUEEN MARY: Don't you know that it will take more than L.S.D. to get to this hardhearted old queen?

FAVONIUS: I think you will be surprised at what the young can do for the old.

QUEEN MARY: What can you do for me, gorgeous?

FAVONIUS: But it's up to the young to shock the old so they know what's happening.

QUEEN MARY: So—shock me, baby.

FAVONIUS: I'll bet you're pushing thirty.

QUEEN MARY: Flower child, I adore you. (Kisses FAVONIUS on the forehead.)

MISS APPLE: (Stands on her milk crate.) Neither one of you understands how the voracious capitalism of the United States affects the rest of the world. Take United Fruit Company. They had to change their name to United Brands because United Fruit became a dirty word.

QUEEN MARY: United Fruit? Is that a gay club?

MISS APPLE: The U.S. government worked very closely with United Fruit in South America to maintain the highly stratified fiefdom—they practiced institutionalized racism—non-whites were forced to yield their jobs to whites. They opposed any attempts at the formation of unions. They would abandon entire areas if unionism started to gain a foothold. They would tear down the housing and schools they had built, leaving the area destitute. (Trips and almost falls down.)

QUEEN MARY: I must say—it's hard for a rather plump, empty bag to stand upright!

MISS APPLE: You are despicable. (Rummages in her purse for a cigarette. Finds an empty pack and throws it on the floor.)

FAVONIUS: I've got some heavy shit from Marakesh.

QUEEN MARY: Let's see—where are my—? (Searches in milk crate.)

MISS APPLE: You have a cigarette?

QUEEN MARY: Debs.

MISS APPLE: Eugene Debs, American socialist. He received almost a million votes in the presidential election of 1920, while—

QUEEN MARY: Relax, Miss Unconsciousness. (Whips out a package of Kents. Holds up the package of cigarettes and smiles. Delivers his lines to audience.) “Debs, the cigarette for the young lady with discriminating taste. Debs has a red filter tip so your lipstick won’t show. Debs is the rage of Saint-Tropez and Palm Beach.” (Turns to FAVONIUS.) You say, “Debs’ll do ya!”

FAVONIUS: Debs’ll do ya!

QUEEN MARY: Again!

FAVONIUS: Debs’ll do ya!

QUEEN MARY: (à la Mae West.) Debs is extra long and its red-hot tip will do ya—will it ever! (Offers cigarette to MISS APPLE.)

MISS APPLE: (Takes and looks at it.) It doesn’t have a red filter.

QUEEN MARY: Really, actually, I smoked Wings during the Second World War. Oh heavens—Wings—Frankie. I met him at the Old Colony in Greenwich Village. So handsome in his powder-blue Air Force uniform. A tail gunner on a B-52 bomber. When he went overseas, I would sip a martini and play our song over and over and cry my eyes out.

(Song: “He Wears a Pair of Silver Wings,” lyrics by Eric Maschwitz and music by Michael Carr. QUEEN MARY sings with real feeling.)

“Although some people say he’s just a crazy guy
To me he means a million other things
For he’s the one who taught this happy heart of mine to fly
He wears a pair of silver wings
And though it’s pretty tough, the job he does above
I wouldn’t have him change it for a king
An ordinary fellow in a uniform I love
He wears a pair of silver wings
Why, I’m so full of pride when we go walking
Every time he’s home on leave
He with those wings on his tunic
And me with my heart on my sleeve
But when I’m left alone and we are far apart
I sometimes wonder what tomorrow brings
For I adore that crazy guy who taught my happy heart
To wear a pair of silver wings
(Brief instrumental interlude.)
For I adore that crazy guy who taught my happy heart
To wear a pair of silver wings.”

(Speaks.) Then—then his plane was shot down over Salerno, Italy—he was the lone survivor, but—but he was paralyzed from the waist down. (Can’t stop the

tears.) I went to visit him in the V.A. Hospital in Pittsburgh, but he refused to see me. What would his veteran buddies say when they saw him with this nellie queen? He died a few months later.

MISS APPLE: Twelve ten P.M. Queen Mary wallowing in sentimental fantasy. She, uh—he was nine, maybe ten years old when the Second World War ended.

(ILSA is sitting on her box, reading Spankers Monthly. MISTER JELLO is asleep in a sitting position against upstage wall. QUEEN MARY is selecting a necklace and earrings.)

MISS APPLE: (Motions to FAVONIUS.) Come here! (FAVONIUS smiles and holds up the peace sign.) Do you realize you are trespassing?

FAVONIUS: I am?

MISS APPLE: This is my apartment.

FAVONIUS: (Looks around.) Groovy-lookin' pad.

MISS APPLE: (Pause.) It's a cold-water flat in Bedford-Stuyvesant, stupid.

FAVONIUS: So it is.

MISS APPLE: I'm going to ask you questions for my thesis.

FAVONIUS: Lay it on me.

MISS APPLE: Mahatma Gandhi?

FAVONIUS: "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind."

MISS APPLE: Krishnamurti?

FAVONIUS: "To progress from being a sinner to being a saint is to progress from one illusion to another."

MISS APPLE: The *New York Times*?

FAVONIUS: Doesn't have any funnies.

MISS APPLE: What do you read?

FAVONIUS: Don Juan through Carlos Castaneda!

MISS APPLE: That fraud?

FAVONIUS: "It's better to get something worthwhile done using deception than to fail to get something worthwhile done using truth."

MISS APPLE: (Rolls her eyes in disgust.) Music?

FAVONIUS: Beethoven and the Jefferson Airplane.

MISS APPLE: What year is it?

FAVONIUS: Doesn't really matter.

MISS APPLE: (Triumphant.) You don't know! (Writes.) Who is the President of the United States?

QUEEN MARY: Next she'll be asking you who is buried in Grant's Tomb.

ILSA: Say the secret word and a duck will pop up and fuck you for free!

(MISS APPLE puts cigarette in mouth. FAVONIUS lights it with a Zippo lighter.)

MISS APPLE: (Sits and writes furiously. Becomes very angry.) Twelve fifteen P.M.

Case history of longhair. Upper-middle-class Jew from the Bronx. Rebelling against father, who owns a hock shop in Harlem. They spend two months of the

year in a purple palace in Miami Beach. They talk of the unspeakable atrocities that the Arabs have committed on the Jews—they have a double-framed picture of Moshe Dayan and Golda Meier in their hotel room. (Jumps up.) Hmmm. How will he—?

(MISS APPLE takes a puff from her cigarette and then proceeds to burst the balloons on FAVONIUS's tree with her lit cigarette.)

QUEEN MARY: You are such a balloon-bust—such a ball-buster!

MISS APPLE: I'm performing a scientific experiment to understand the ramifications of the longhair phenomenon.

QUEEN MARY: Stick to your fantasy ghetto, Miss Plastic Pussy!

MISS APPLE: (Sputters.) You—you—

QUEEN MARY: Since you can't get the real thing—try this! (Takes a 12-inch dildo from his milk crate and throws it at MISS APPLE.)

MISS APPLE: You're envious because you don't have a vagina! (Kicks the dildo. It ends up at QUEEN MARY's feet.)

QUEEN MARY: Welcome home, Percy, my love! (Kisses the head of the dildo, then puts it back in his milk crate.)

ILSA: (Crosses to MISS APPLE.) Tell the kid you're sorry.

MISS APPLE: I told you that I was—

ILSA: (Doubles up her fist.) You want the shit beat out of you?

MISS APPLE: Puh-lease! (Looks at ILSA closely.) You're old enough to be my mother. Isn't it about time you retired from the oldest profession?

ILSA: You're asking for it, bitch! (Doubles up her fist and hits MISS APPLE in the stomach.) Tell Favonius you're sorry, asshole!

MISS APPLE: You—you two-bit prostitute. You—

(ILSA hits MISS APPLE on the jaw. They grapple. MISS APPLE is clawing and pulling ILSA's hair. They roll around on the floor. ILSA flips MISS APPLE over on her stomach. Gets MISS APPLE's arm in a hammerlock behind her.)

MISS APPLE: (Screaming.) You're—you're breaking my arm!

ILSA: Tell him you're sorry!

MISS APPLE: (Screams bloody murder.) I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

ILSA: You leave his flowers and his tree alone!

(ILSA twists MISS APPLE's arm again.)

MISS APPLE: Ow! Ow! I—I promise! I promise!

(ILSA lets go of MISS APPLE. She picks up Spankers Monthly and begins to read.

FAVONIUS crosses downstage and helps MISS APPLE to her milk crate. He picks up her glasses, her notepad, and her pencil.)

MISS APPLE: It's very confusing.

FAVONIUS: We are not punished for our sins, we are punished by our sins.

MISS APPLE: (Picks up her notebook. Frowns at FAVONIUS.) What did you say your—?

FAVONIUS: Favonius. I was named after the gentle west wind.

MISS APPLE: (Writes in her notebook.) Twelve twenty P.M. Four denizens of the ghetto have invaded my—

(FAVONIUS watches MISS APPLE for a moment, then picks up his tree and moves upstage. ILSA puts down Spankers Monthly.)

ILSA: Do you have any more balloons? (FAVONIUS hands her a balloon. She blows it up and puts it on the tree.) Another one. (FAVONIUS gives her another balloon. She blows it up and puts it on the tree. FAVONIUS blows up a balloon and puts it on the tree.) “A little madness in the spring is wholesome even for the king.” (ILSA blows up another balloon.)

FAVONIUS: “I meant to do my work today. But a brown bird sang in the apple tree. And a butterfly flitted across the field. And all the leaves were calling me.”

ILSA: “Alone with myself. The trees bend to caress me. The shade hugs my heart.”

FAVONIUS: “The trees in their prayer, the birds in praise, the first blue violets kneeling.”

ILSA: Spring! Spring! Spring!

(FAVONIUS take an imaginary rose from his head, holds it under ILSA’s nose.)

ILSA: (Takes it and smells it.) “How do I talk to a little rose?”

FAVONIUS: “Through it you talk to the infinite.”

ILSA: “It is the silent, small force.”

FAVONIUS: “The infinite is not confined in the visible world.”

ILSA: “It is not the earthquake, the wind, or the fire.”

FAVONIUS: “It is that still small voice that calls up the fairies.”

ILSA: (Points to imaginary moon on the fourth wall.) There it is, and it’s full. (Claps her hands.) “Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon. The little dog laughed to see such sport, and the dish ran away with the spoon.”

FAVONIUS: “I see the moon—the moon sees me—Muhammad blesses the moon, and Muhammad blesses me.”

MISS APPLE: The moon? For heaven’s sakes, it’s high noon!

ILSA: The breeze—a caress of love.

(FAVONIUS puts the imaginary rose in ILSA’s hair. He takes her hand. They are about to kiss. MISTER JELLO jumps in between them.)

MISTER JELLO: Disgusting! Disgusting! Disgusting! (Pulls them apart.)

QUEEN MARY: Leave them alone, fatso!

MISTER JELLO: You cheated me out of five minutes so you could fuck this filthy hippie!

ILSA: Go in the corner and jerk off.

MISTER JELLO: (Grabs her arm.) You broads are all alike. All you want is my money. What did I get out of it? Nothing but a hard-on.

ILSA: (Sarcastic.) My poor Little Johnny!

MISTER JELLO: I’ll settle for a quick blow job.

(ILSA knees MISTER JELLO in the groin. Then she gives him a karate chop on the back of the neck. He falls screaming to the floor.)

ILSA: (Crosses to FAVONIUS.) Let's go for a walk in Tompkins Square Park.

(FAVONIUS puts his arm around ILSA's waist and they slowly exit stage left. MISS APPLE watches as they leave.)

MISS APPLE: I can't believe it! They—they are gone—they have left my apartment.

(QUEEN MARY takes off his pants. Then he gets his dress and his bra from the milk crate. He is wearing a dance belt.)

QUEEN MARY: Miss Apple. As our darling Favonius would say, it's our karma. It's where we want to be. Does it matter as long as it works? Isn't it the pragmatic way—the American way? (Looks offstage.) What, Antoine? (Shocked.) Two minutes? You must be joshing! (Quickly puts on his bra and his dress. Grabs his jewel box and opens it.) What—what should I—? (Examines a pearl necklace.)

MISS APPLE: You have the cleverest rationale for being insane that I have ever heard.

QUEEN MARY: I was a star at Finocchio's in San Francisco, and then I decided to come to New York and hit the big time. And yes, here I am, the star attraction at the Club Engagé. Believe me, it is not easy with all the young drag queens trying to claw their way to the top—trying to push Queen Mary off her throne. (Takes a rhinestone tiara from the milk crate and carefully puts it on his head.) I have to be ruthless to stay up here. The atmosphere is rarefied, and it's—so—so lonely—lonely at the top.

MISS APPLE: You're obsolescent.

QUEEN MARY: But of course I am. Don't you know that this country is built on planned obsolescence, and—(Puts padding in his bra) and you've got to admit I'm built! (Thrusts out his chest. Puts on his Yma Sumac earrings.)

MISS APPLE: (Laughs.) You don't look a day over fifty.

QUEEN MARY: You are full of loving kindness.

MISS APPLE: You are a cliché!

QUEEN MARY: How on earth did you guess? That's where I get my beauty. You can call me Clara!

MISS APPLE: Clara Cliché?

QUEEN MARY: So terribly clairvoyant of you, sweetie pie. (Faces the fourth wall.) And now, ladies and gentlemen, direct from Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, the star of our show, Miss Clara Cliché!

MISS APPLE: I thought your name was Queen Mary.

QUEEN MARY: It was originally Cornelius Crumbustle, but I've had to re-invent myself over and over to survive.

MISS APPLE: So tell me, Cornelius, what do you know about the real history of this country?

QUEEN MARY: I beg your pardon?

MISS APPLE: I'm positive you believe the propaganda that has been pounded into your head by the public school system.

QUEEN MARY: (Puts his hand over his heart. Looks up at the flag. Very, very sincere.) “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands: one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

MISS APPLE: God? God? Brainwashing! (Pause.) Nat Turner!

QUEEN MARY: Antoine? How much time do I have? (Pause.) Mercy, I—

MISS APPLE: You don’t know who Nat Turner is!

(QUEEN MARY is frazzled as he makes last-minute preparations for his stage appearance. The words he speaks have no relationship to what he is doing. The acid is freaking him out.)

QUEEN MARY: A slave—a slave who managed to live in this corrupt society for thirty-one years. He was the leader of the Southampton Insurrection. He tried to lead his fellow slaves to freedom. Managed to knock off fifty-five whites. Of course, he was hanged. For further information on Nat Turner, read Herbert Aptheker’s *American Negro Slave Revolts*.

MISS APPLE: I’ve read all of Aptheker.

QUEEN MARY: Good for you, toots! (Starts to put on his necklace. It falls to the floor and breaks, pearls scattering all over the stage. He is on his hands and knees, picking up the pearls.) Queen Mary gave them to me.

MISS APPLE: John Reed.

QUEEN MARY: I must wear the emeralds that darling Emperor Franz Josef gave me.

MISS APPLE: You don’t know! You don’t!

QUEEN MARY: (Gets up, grabs his hand mirror, and looks at himself.) I’m—I’m invisible.

MISS APPLE: John Reed! John Reed, you idiot!

QUEEN MARY: (Frenetic.) Miss Reed was involved with gauche shit like reporting the truth about Pancho Villa’s revolution in Mexico for the capitalist press—well, La Establishment let her have it up the old kazoo. They fired the poor dear, so she gathered her skirts and minced off to Russia. When she found out she couldn’t tell the truth there, she ate a piece of fruit and died of some horrible Asian disease. However, the real horror was that Joanna Reed was buried in that bastion of reactionary thought—the Kremlin. She was buried between two untruths. (Runs stage right.) Antoine, I need five minutes more. Otherwise, I will cancel! (Pause.) Oh, thank you, dear. Thank you! (Sits. Picks up mirror and holds it to his chest. He is scared to look into it. Will he still be invisible? He finally looks into it.) Oh! I’m as beautiful as ever.

MISS APPLE: You’re sweating like a pig.

QUEEN MARY: It’s like a Turkish bath in here.

MISS APPLE: It’s more than hot—it’s excruciatingly hot.

QUEEN MARY: Yes, yes it is!

MISS APPLE: You stupid idiot. If you’ll look out the window, it looks like snow—or even a slushy rain.

QUEEN MARY: Did you say rain? Rain? All queens melt in the rain.

MISS APPLE: (Sits on her milk crate and writes.) Twelve twenty P.M. Drag queen has no—

(The lights dim on MISS APPLE. They come up on MISTER JELLO. He has an unlit cigar stuck in his mouth. He fixes his tie and crosses to QUEEN MARY.)

MISTER JELLO: Hello, uh, Miss—?

QUEEN MARY: Clara. Clara Cliché. (à la Mae West.) Is that a gun in your shorts, or are you just glad to see me?

MISTER JELLO: Uh—Miss Cliché, I wonder if—?

QUEEN MARY: Don't be bashful, darling.

MISTER JELLO: Do you mind if I call you Clara?

QUEEN MARY: Miss Clara.

MISTER JELLO: I like old-fashioned names, Miss Clara.

QUEEN MARY: I'm named after Clara Bow, the original "It" girl.

MISTER JELLO: You're much prettier than Clara Bow.

QUEEN MARY: You're not just saying that, are you?

MISTER JELLO: You're gorgeous!

QUEEN MARY: (Takes a silk hankie and spreads it on his milk crate. Motions

MISTER JELLO toward him with his index finger.) Come over here and sit—(à la Mae West.) sit on my box.

MISTER JELLO: You want me to, Miss Clara?

QUEEN MARY: I'm not going to hurt you.

MISTER JELLO: Uh—when—when I'm around a beautiful woman, I'm, uh—I'm tongue-tied.

QUEEN MARY: I adore bashful men. (Takes MISTER JELLO by the hand and leads him to his milk crate.) Sit!

(MISTER JELLO sits. QUEEN MARY gets fake diamond earrings. He holds them up in front of MISTER JELLO.)

MISTER JELLO: Are they real?

QUEEN MARY: I would never—never wear fake earrings.

MISTER JELLO: I didn't mean to—

QUEEN MARY: Queen Mary gave them to me when I was sweet sixteen. (Moves the earrings back and forth in front of MISTER JELLO's eyes.) Sweetie pie, will you do Miss Clara a big favor?

MISTER JELLO: You name it, Miss Clara.

QUEEN MARY: Is that a promise?

MISTER JELLO: (Nods his head.) Uh-huh!

(QUEEN MARY starts to put an earring on MISTER JELLO's ear.)

MISTER JELLO: (Snarling.) What the fuck do you think you're doing?

QUEEN MARY: You mustn't use naughty words in front of Miss Clara.

MISTER JELLO: Can you forgive me?

QUEEN MARY: I just want you to model these fabulous diamond earrings for Miss Clara.

MISTER JELLO: You've got to be—

QUEEN MARY: But you promised.

MISTER JELLO: I did?

QUEEN MARY: Yes, you did, you gorgeous hunk.

MISTER JELLO: And, uh—well—

QUEEN MARY: Now hold still while I—there! (Puts the earrings on MISTER JELLO.)

MISTER JELLO: I've never done anything like—

QUEEN MARY: Shhhh! Shhhh! (Puts his index finger on MISTER JELLO's lips.

MISTER JELLO kisses QUEEN MARY's finger.)

(Song: "Yours." Music by Gonzalo Roig, 1931. Original title was "Quéreme Mucho."

English lyrics by Jack Sherr. As QUEEN MARY sings, he slowly moves around

MISTER JELLO, caressing him with his hands from head to toe.)

"Yours 'til the stars lose their glory

Yours 'til the birds fail to sing

Yours to the end of life's story

This pledge to you, dear, I bring

Yours in the gray of December

Here or on far distant shores

I've never loved anyone the way I love you

How could I, when I was born to be

Just yours

This night has music, the sweetest music

It echoes somewhere within my heart

I hold you near me, oh darling, hear me

I have a message I must impart

Yours 'til the stars lose their glory

Yours 'til the birds fail to sing

Yours to the end of life's story

This pledge to you dear, I bring

Just yours

When I was born to be just yours."

(MISTER JELLO is in a trance of ecstasy.)

QUEEN MARY: Oh, where did I put it? I have this incredible chapeau with ostrich feathers. Neville Chamberlain gave it to me on a weekend when he signed the treaty—the Munich Agreement with Hitler. Ah—voilà! Here it is! (Takes a tacky-looking hat from the milk crate.)

MISTER JELLO: (Snaps out of his trance.) What are you—?

QUEEN MARY: Hush, my love. (Puts the hat on MISTER JELLO. Steps back and admires it.) Perfectamente! It is so you, except for—(Takes cigar butt out of

MISTER JELLO's mouth. Puts it in MISTER JELLO's jacket pocket. Picks up the mirror.) Have a look-see!

MISTER JELLO: No.

QUEEN MARY: Does Miss Clara have to coax you?

MISTER JELLO: I feel silly. (Finally looks at his reflection in the mirror.) Ugh!
(Grimaces.)

QUEEN MARY: Exquisite. You put Theda Bara to shame.

MISTER JELLO: Who the hell is—?

QUEEN MARY: You are utterly devastating, my dear!

(QUEEN MARY runs his hand over MISTER JELLO's chest and down his leg.)

MISTER JELLO: Oh, oh my God, you're—

QUEEN MARY: (Runs his hand down MISTER JELLO's inner thigh.) Where—is—?
Where? Oh, here is the li'l darling.

MISTER JELLO: Yes! Yes!

QUEEN MARY: Go with it, honey. Let it happen.

MISTER JELLO: That feels so—so—

QUEEN MARY: Close your eyes!

(MISTER JELLO closes his eyes.)

QUEEN MARY: (Rubbing MISTER JELLO's groin.) Who—who are you, my little angel?

MISTER JELLO: I'm Little Johnny and I'm five—I'm five years old.

QUEEN MARY: No! No! No! You're not Little Johnny.

MISTER JELLO: (In ecstasy—on the verge of orgasm.) I'm not Little Johnny?

QUEEN MARY: Of course not.

MISTER JELLO: Then who am I?

QUEEN MARY: You're little Rose Marie and you're only four years old.

MISTER JELLO: (Opens one eye.) Your hand, your hand!

QUEEN MARY: Who are you, my dear?

MISTER JELLO: Give me your fuckin' hand.

QUEEN MARY: (Takes his hand away.) Not until you admit you are my sweet little girl!

MISTER JELLO: Okay! Okay! I'm sweet little Rose Marie and I'm four years old.

QUEEN MARY: Yes! Yes! Yes! (Gives MISTER JELLO's penis a tweak, then rushes stage right.) What, Antoine? You must be joshing. One minute?

MISTER JELLO: (Shouting.) All I need is ten seconds!

QUEEN MARY: (Grabs mirror and looks at himself.) Heavens! (Grabs lipstick and retouches his lips.) Your Mummy has to earn a living so she can support her babycums.

MISTER JELLO: Please? A quickie.

QUEEN MARY: Talking like that at your age. You ought to be ashamed.

MISTER JELLO: Please, Miss Clara, I—

QUEEN MARY: All right, all right! I'll take care of you as soon as I finish my act.
(Exits.)

ANNOUNCER: (Offstage.) Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the world-famous Club Engagé. Tonight we have the privilege of presenting, direct from Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, that charismatic charmer, that wild wanton of the west, that femme fatale, that beauty of all beauties, that devastating diva—that star that shines above all other stars in the universe, Miss Clara Cliché!

(Fanfare. A spot on QUEEN MARY as he enters. Song: "Blues in the Night," lyrics by Johnny Mercer, music by Harold Arlen.)

QUEEN MARY: (Faces the audience and sings.)

"My mama done tol' me
When I was in pigtails
My mama done tol' me, Hon
A man's gonna sweet-talk
And give you the big eye
But when that sweet-talkin's done
A man is a two face, a worrisome thing
Who'll leave you to sing the blues in the night
Now the rain's a-fallin'
Hear the trains a-callin'
Whoo-ee (my mama done tol' me)
Hear that lonesome whistle
Blowin' 'cross the trestle
Whoo-ee (my mama done tol' me)
A-whoo-ee-duh-whoo-ee, ol' clickety clack's
A-echoin' back the blues in the night
The evenin' breeze'll start the trees to prayin'
And the moon'll dim its light
When you hear the blues in the night
Take my word, the mockin'bird'll
Sing the saddest kind o' song
He knows things are wrong and he's right
From Natchez to Mobile
From Memphis to Saint Joe
Wherever the four winds blow
I been to some big towns
I heard me some big talk
But there's one thing I know
A man is a two face, a worrisome thing
Who'll leave you to sing the blues in the night

My mama done tol' me
There's blues in the night."

(Applause from the audience. QUEEN MARY bows. Blackout. The sound of four gunshots. Lights up on QUEEN MARY center stage with a smoking revolver in his hand.)

QUEEN MARY: (à la Bette Davis.) Pet-ter! Pet-ter! Where are you, Pet-ter? (Pause. Crosses stage right.) Antoine, where the fuck is that drunk who plays Pet-ter? (Pause.) Heavens! (Realizes he is still holding the revolver.) I must—(Puts revolver on top of milk crate and picks up his fan.)

FAVONIUS: (Enters with ILSE.) Hey, man, what's happening?

QUEEN MARY: I'm—I'm—(Fans himself furiously.) a trifle lightheaded.

FAVONIUS: It's heavy acid, man.

QUEEN MARY: That two-bit actor didn't show up. My career is ruined. I—he—
what—what can I—?

FAVONIUS: It's all an illusion. It—

QUEEN MARY: Illusion?

FAVONIUS: Appearances are never the truth, man.

QUEEN MARY: Stop calling me "man"! (Frantically pushes FAVONIUS stage left.)
You make your entrance stage left when I give you your cue. Your name is Pet-ter!

FAVONIUS: Cool! (Exits.)

QUEEN MARY: (Emotes directly to the fourth wall.) Pet-ter! The let-ter, I must have the let-ter!

(FAVONIUS enters.)

FAVONIUS: (Declaims like a Shakespearean actor.) Groovy pad you got here.

QUEEN MARY: (In agony.) Pet-ter! The let-ter! The let-ter!

FAVONIUS: Love is the master key which opens the gates of happiness.

QUEEN MARY: (Puckers up his lips.) Kiss me! Kiss me!

FAVONIUS: Far fuckin' out!

(FAVONIUS takes QUEEN MARY in his arms and kisses him.)

QUEEN MARY: Oh, Pet-ter, this is our last tryst. I'll never—never see you again—for all eternity, but—but to look at you—to look deeply into your limpid green eyes. To—

FAVONIUS: My eyes are brown.

(QUEEN MARY is playing the scene to the fourth wall. He upstages FAVONIUS.)

QUEEN MARY: Pet-ter, Pet-ter, Pet-ter, I love thee with a love that shall not die. Till the sun grows cold and the stars grow old.

FAVONIUS: If God created anything more beautiful than you, he kept it to himself.

QUEEN MARY: Pet-ter, our last moment—let's make it magic. Magic, Pet-ter!

FAVONIUS: Let's buy a hundred-pound bag of brown rice and split for the woods.

QUEEN MARY: Crush me, Pet-ter, crush me!

FAVONIUS: (His regular voice.) Relax and go with the acid.

QUEEN MARY: Crush me in your strong arms like you've never crushed me before.
(Moves FAVONIUS downstage.) Oh, Pet-ter, don't let us ask for the moon. We have the stars!

FAVONIUS: I never knew how to worship until I knew how to love you.

QUEEN MARY: (Pulls away from FAVONIUS.) I must have a cigarette before I go mad.

FAVONIUS: All great artists have a touch of madness.

QUEEN MARY: My persona will fall apart if I don't have a cigarette!

FAVONIUS: Darling, remember, there is no fear in love, and our perfect love casts out fear.

QUEEN MARY: Pet-ter—I must have a hundred-millimet-ter cigarette! Do you have a hundred-millimet-ter, Pet-ter?

FAVONIUS: You don't need a coffin nail. You have my love!

QUEEN MARY: Pet-ter! You're so strong. So hard—like steel—ooooh!

FAVONIUS: I'm not like steel. I'm flesh and blood—just like you!

QUEEN MARY: (Terrified.) You're just like me?

FAVONIUS: I'm not Pet-ter! I'm Favonius. I was named after the gentle west wind.

QUEEN MARY: Pet-ter, I just killed my husband. I—

FAVONIUS: Favonius!

QUEEN MARY: Pet-ter! Pet-ter! Pet-ter! (Pause.) Holy Mary, I can't remember my lines!

(QUEEN MARY is desperately trying to stay in character as Bette Davis.)

FAVONIUS: Groovy, man, groovy!

QUEEN MARY: I've always been a professional. I've never let down my fans. I—

FAVONIUS: But now they're seeing the real Queen Mary.

QUEEN MARY: (Frightened.) Horror of horrors. (Hides his face behind his fan.) I'm an old queen and I'm corrupt. I have settled for what is. You have all your hopes and dreams ahead of you—your life hasn't been distorted—ruined. It—

FAVONIUS: Go with the flow.

QUEEN MARY: How can I? There would be nothing left—my career—my adoring fans—the legend of Clara Cliché, superstar!

(FAVONIUS reaches out—holds QUEEN MARY's hands.)

FAVONIUS: Wow! The energy—it's flowing!

QUEEN MARY: (Startled.) What is happening? What?

FAVONIUS: Cop to it, Queen Mary.

QUEEN MARY: What on earth are you—?

FAVONIUS: You feel the energy, the life force.

QUEEN MARY: I'm disintegrating. I—

FAVONIUS: No, you're not.

QUEEN MARY: I'm not?

FAVONIUS: Our naked souls are tripping together.

QUEEN MARY: My naked soul? (Sniffs.) Hah! The pungent smell of decay.

FAVONIUS: (Touches his forehead.) Look at my third eye.

QUEEN MARY: I beg your pardon?

FAVONIUS: The window to my soul.

QUEEN MARY: I don't—it's the acid.

FAVONIUS: You are seeing into my naked soul.

QUEEN MARY: (Beginning to see into FAVONIUS's soul. He is terrified.) I must—I'm projecting my rotten soul onto you because you're pure and innocent. You're—

FAVONIUS: Look at the shadow of my soul.

QUEEN MARY: Oh my God, I—(Looking into FAVONIUS's third eye.) Village in Vietnam—women with their babies in their arms and the toothless old men. (Becomes interrogating soldier.) Where are you hiding the Vietcong? Where, goddammit! Where? Won't talk, huh? (Back to being QUEEN MARY.) Bamboo slivers under their fingernails—digging their own graves.

FAVONIUS: How many did I kill? I don't want to know. (Holds up his hands.) Blood on my hands but—but I didn't feel any pain until I finally kicked the smack six months later.

(Lights up on the stage.)

MISS APPLE: (Spits on FAVONIUS.) A trained assassin.

MISTER JELLO: (Spits on FAVONIUS.) A dope fiend.

QUEEN MARY: (Hands to face.) Where—where on earth am I?

MISS APPLE: In my apartment, you idiot! (Grabs the revolver from the top of QUEEN MARY's milk crate. Points the revolver at QUEEN MARY and then at FAVONIUS.) Get out of my apartment! (FAVONIUS smiles. MISS APPLE takes a step closer.) Get out—now!—or I'll shoot you!

FAVONIUS: I see the beautiful blending of life and death—their unity—mountains and streams. "Death is stingless indeed, and as beautiful as life."

MISS APPLE: You're not scared to die?

FAVONIUS: "The fear of death follows from the fear of life. A man who lives fully is prepared to die at any time." (MISS APPLE sticks the revolver in his stomach.) Miss Apple—sit down and relax. How about a tab of windowpane so you can find out what life is all about?

MISS APPLE: How dare you—how dare you feel sorry for me? You—you—
(MISS APPLE throws the gun against the upstage flat.)

MISTER JELLO: (Picks up the gun.) Mummy! Mummy! Look what little Rose Marie's got!

(MISTER JELLO points the gun at ILSA.)

ILSA: (Holds her hands palms outward. Frightened.) Give me the gun, Little Johnny!

MISTER JELLO: I'm little Rose Marie.

ILSA: Please give me the gun, uh—sweet, uh—darling, uh—Rose Marie. Mummy doesn't want you to hurt yourself. (MISTER JELLO skips around ILSA.) I'll give

you an extra hour and I won't charge you! (MISTER JELLO pulls the trigger. Water spurts out of it—he gets ILSA wet.) Why, you motherfucker!

(ILSA grabs the bullwhip and chases MISTER JELLO up center aisle. They exit.)

MISS APPLE: (Heaves a sigh of relief.) Thank God.

QUEEN MARY: I thought you didn't believe in God.

MISS APPLE: Now it's your turn—out—get out of my apartment!

QUEEN MARY: You are dreadfully provincial, my dear—you are stuck in circumstances.

MISS APPLE: Get out! Get out!

(MISS APPLE attacks QUEEN MARY. She rips off his wig and throws it against the upstage wall. She yanks off his necklace. She dips her hands in QUEEN MARY's cold cream, then smears it on his face. QUEEN MARY stands motionless.)

QUEEN MARY: You are tacky, my dear.

MISS APPLE: Admit you're in my apartment.

QUEEN MARY: I'm in my excruciatingly hot dressing room at the Club Engagé.

MISS APPLE: You don't know what it's like to live in a ghetto!

QUEEN MARY: I don't know what it's like to live in a ghetto? (Laughs bitterly.) I've lived in the ghetto all my life. Ah—the garbage-strewn streets with the gigantic rats biting at my five-inch heels. I will always hear the musical voices of the Puerto Ricans with their burning hot eyes yelling at me—"Maricón! Maricón! Maricón!"

(Scary music. The sound of heavy thunder and pounding rain. QUEEN MARY stands on milk crate. Holds his hands to the heavens.)

QUEEN MARY: (Speaks very slowly.) All—drag—queens—melt—in—the—rain. All—drag—queens—melt—in—the—rain.

(The lights dim. We still hear the music. ILSA and MISTER JELLO enter down center aisle. They move center stage. MISTER JELLO sits on milk crate downstage. He is still wearing his picture hat, the earrings, and the lipstick smears from QUEEN MARY's kisses. ILSA is stage left of MISTER JELLO with her arm on his shoulder. MISS APPLE is stage right of MISTER JELLO. FAVONIUS is not in the scene. The sound of heavy rain.)

MISTER JELLO: What time is it, Mother?

ILSA: (Looks at her wristwatch.) Exactly two minutes to eight.

MISS APPLE: It's ten minutes of. I checked with the operator.

QUEEN MARY: (A teenager's voice.) Can we watch Liberace on "The Colgate Comedy Hour"?

ILSA: We always watch "Father Knows Best."

MISS APPLE: Mother, that is not true. Last week we watched "The Donna Reed Show."

ILSA: Now, now, children. Your father is tired. Uh—Daddy?

MISTER JELLO: Yes, Mother?

ILSA: You better get out of those wet clothes or you'll catch your death of cold.

MISTER JELLO: Yes, dear.

ILSA: It was sunny this morning—almost like spring, but then—I’ve never seen it rain so hard.

MISTER JELLO: It was a long, long trip.

MISS APPLE: Daddy, help me with my civics.

MISTER JELLO: (Looks into fourth wall.) Your what?

MISS APPLE: My civics, Daddy.

MISTER JELLO: Buzz? Buzz?

ILSA: I’m sure he’s in the vacant lot behind the grocery store.

MISTER JELLO: You think maybe he is?

ILSA: I’ll bet he’s throwing the football at the bull’s eye.

MISTER JELLO: Just—just the way I taught him.

ILSA: Our Buzz practices all the time.

MISTER JELLO: My son, my son.

ILSA: Everybody loves Buzz—everybody!

MISTER JELLO: He should be home by now, Mother. He should—(Pause.) Where’s my Buzz?

QUEEN MARY: I really missed you while you were gone, Daddy.

MISTER JELLO: Where did I go wrong with Buzz?

QUEEN MARY: Daddy, I want you to know—

ILSA: Don’t interrupt your father.

QUEEN MARY: I just want to tell Daddy how much I love him.

ILSA: Your father is tired—very tired.

QUEEN MARY: Daddy, I know it’s dreadful the way Buzz died of an overdose, but—

ILSA: (Slaps QUEEN MARY.) Shut your nasty mouth!

MISTER JELLO: (Looks directly at QUEEN MARY.) Where are you, my son?

QUEEN MARY: I’m right here, Daddy!

MISTER JELLO: I know Buzz didn’t get the best grades in school. Maybe he did cheat a little but it wasn’t his fault—he kept bad company. The Jewish kid—the kike—he taught Buzz how to cheat.

QUEEN MARY: I didn’t cheat, Daddy. I—

MISTER JELLO: He was a four-letter man. The best colleges in the country wanted my Buzz. (Looks at QUEEN MARY.) Do you know why? Because Buzz is a hero!

ILSA: Yes, our boy was a hero!

MISTER JELLO: Was? Was?

ILSA: Is, Daddy—is a hero. (Pause.) How did it go in Philly, Daddy?

MISTER JELLO: I knocked ’em dead. These young kids today—they don’t know how to sell. They don’t know the tradition. I got a big order.

QUEEN MARY: (Claps his hands.) You’re the best salesman in the whole world.

MISTER JELLO: But—but I’m old—old and tired.

(ILSA kisses MISTER JELLO on the cheek.)

ILSA: You'll always be twenty-one to me, Daddy.

MISTER JELLO: (Angry.) This young whippersnapper—wet behind the ears—he's my new boss. I heard him say, "Here comes the old fart. Spends hours talkin' about that blockhead son of his who got kicked out of high school for cheating, and—" (Slams his fist into his other hand.) I wanted to throttle him, I—

ILSA: Now, now, Daddy. Why don't you lie down?

MISTER JELLO: I've been tired for the last ten years, Mother. They use you and—and throw you away. I'm garbage—nothing but—

ILSA: Things will look brighter in the morning.

MISS APPLE: Did they fire you, Daddy?

ILSA: Shut your nasty mouth!

(ILSA tries to slap MISS APPLE, but MISS APPLE grabs her hand.)

MISTER JELLO: (Stares vacantly at the fourth wall. Whispers.) Buzz?

MISS APPLE: Daddy?

MISTER JELLO: (Not looking at MISS APPLE.) What?

MISS APPLE: Miss Adair was explaining capital investment in the Union of South Africa, and I asked her why does the United States back a government that has an official policy of apartheid, and—

ILSA: Don't bother your father with politics!

MISS APPLE: I'm talking to Daddy.

ILSA: Daddy doesn't want to hear—

MISS APPLE: Any time I talk to Daddy, you interrupt.

(MISS APPLE throws her arms around MISTER JELLO. Kisses him on the mouth.)

MISS APPLE: I love you, Daddy!

MISTER JELLO: All these wasted years.

QUEEN MARY: Daddy? (No answer.) Daddy?

MISTER JELLO: Buzz?

QUEEN MARY: It's not Buzz. It's your other son. It's—(Pause.)

MISTER JELLO: (Still staring at the fourth wall.) What—what?

QUEEN MARY: I made straight A's down the line. I beat out Alice Feliz for the smartest kid in my class. I can go to any college in the country—Yale, Harvard, Columbia.

MISTER JELLO: Buzz—he would fade back—he'd pick out his receiver and let go with the football at the last second—just before he was tackled. The pigskin was like a bullet—his teammate dashed down the field—he reached up and there was the football on his fingertips. The crowd—screaming their lungs out—chanting Buzz's name over and over—a hero!—a hero! (His voice changes—he is on the verge of tears. Directly to the fourth wall.) How can I tell Mother? How can I tell her it's all over—that they fired me and hired a young guy just out of high school? (Pause.) How can I? (Pause.) All the promises—all the broken promises. (Pause.) We never did make it out of this neighborhood. I've been

paying on this house for twenty-nine years, and now the neighbors aren't white anymore. Oh, there was a time when these streets were spic and span—you could eat off of them. There was a time when this neighborhood was bathed in an eternal spring. (Laughs bitterly.) Look at it now. The slate-gray clouds and the constant rain. I haven't seen the sun in I don't know how many years. I can't walk down my block—knifings, killings—rape. Why can't they leave us alone—leave us in peace? They're all around us—like locusts.

ILSA: Come, dear, dinner's ready.

MISTER JELLO: I'll just sit on the porch and wait for Buzz.

ILSA: You'll catch your death of cold.

MISTER JELLO: Mother, what's that in the back yard? (The tree is stage left where FAVONIUS exited, but it is in darkness.) It has blossoms on it.

ILSA: It's going to be an early spring.

MISTER JELLO: All different colors. Where did it come from?

ILSA: I really don't know, Daddy.

MISTER JELLO: Do you think Buzz planted it?

ILSA: I wouldn't be the least bit surprised.

MISTER JELLO: It's something Buzz would do.

ILSA: The meatloaf is getting cold, Daddy.

MISTER JELLO: I'm going out to the back yard and wait for Buzz. (Pause.) That Buzz—he didn't forget his father.

(The lights slowly dim. A spotlight slowly comes up on the tree. There are variously colored balloons on it. We hear music from a music box.)

CURTAIN

[“A-Huggin’ and A’Chalkin’,” original music and lyrics by Clancy Hayes and Kermit Goell © 1946 Hudson Music Corp., “A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody” © 1919 Irving Berlin Music Corp., “He Wears a Pair of Silver Wings” © 1941 Peter Maurice Music Co., “Yours” (Quéreme Mucho) © 1941 Edward B. Marks Music, B.M.I., “Blues in the Night” © 1941 Warner Bros., Inc.]

Theater: Birimisa's 'Georgie Porgie'

"If this play is anything, it is about God and the devil and/or beauty and ugliness," writes the playwright-director George Birimisa in the program for his "Georgie Porgie," which opened last night at the Village Arena Theater. He continues: "Essentially it is a seeking—a search for the on-going process of creation and death, all entwined and ever-changing." He must be talking about some other play.

If this play is anything, it is a stale series of vignettes about the varieties of homosexual experience, all entwined and never really changing—all the world's gay and no one is happier for it. Many of the scenes are supposed to have surprise twists, but they are dead giveaways—the entrapment of a cruiser by a police officer, the blubbery old queen's craving for sado-masochism, the muscle-bound he-men humiliating homosexuals but then admiring one another's biceps.

The scenes are loosely threaded together by a character named George, who grows from childhood sissy-

The Cast

GEORGIE PORGIE, a play written and directed by George Birimisa; selling by Joseph DiGiorgio; lighting by John Dodd; music supervised by John Herbert McDowell; production stage manager, David Sullivan. Presented by Georgetown Productions, associate producer, Jack R. Conpton. At The Village Arena Theater, 62 East 4th Street.

Georgie	Claude Barbazon
Ina	Slacy Alden Giles
Statue	Sam Wright
Marv	Geoff Springer
Steve	Barry Kael
Mom	Slacy Alden Giles
Man	John P. McGowan
Strotter	Geoff Springer
Judge's Voice	David Sullivan
Grover	J. Pearson Gant
Finley	Paul Rosson
Jini	Barry Kael
Grace	Slacy Alden Giles
Tony	Richie Broche
Skytar	Paul Rosson
Jack	John P. McGowan
Rufus	Geoff Springer

dom to adult depravity. He can't make it as a son (his mother turns deaf ears to his predilections) or as a husband—he spats with his wife, calls her latent and he is miserable as a homosexual.

In his final aria, he turns on his movie projector and phonograph, tears off his clothes, smothers himself in ethyl chloride, cries "fantasy, fantasy, fantasy, fantasy," and writhes in agony to an apocalyptic end. The agony is not all his—a little pity for the audience.

There are moments—tiny, tiny moments—to alleviate the hysteria. For example, a "can - this - homosexual - marriage - be - saved" scene revolves around a glistening, life-size statue of a nude black man. The owner of the statue, Steve, prefers picking up blacks to living with Marv, and when Steve finally walks out, the rejected Marv shouts, "Don't forget to take that statue!" The statue is played at a standstill by Sam Wright.

Since the acting is otherwise hypertense, the discredit must be shared equally by director Birimisa. Admittedly his cast is not, on evidence, marked by any significant talent, but he needlessly has turned up the treble, directed at a shrill pitch.

This show is obvious and shallow, but there seemed to be fans for it last night, collapsing in cataclysms of laughter at such zingers as—son, using his Joan Crawford voice, to mother: "Do you realize I was 16 before I had a whole stick of Juicy Fruit gum?"

MEL GUSSOW.

The New York Times

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George says, "I was devastated by Mel Gussow's review. In two earlier New York productions, including Ron Link's at the Cubiculo, *Georgie Porgie* had been beautifully received with rave reviews in the alternative press. But this brutal review is all I remembered for the next thirty years."

GEORGIE PORGIE

(1968)

Georgie Porgie was first produced at Eugenia’s Cooper Square Arts Theatre on November 20, 1968, directed by the author, and featured the following cast:

Mom, Ina, Grace.....	Carole Getzoff
George.....	Claude Barbazon
Marvin, Jack, Vernon.....	Dan Leach
Steve, Algernon	Ron Schermer
Ken	Barry Kael
Finley.....	George Birimisa
Grover	Lloyd Carson
Tony	Al Barino
Statue, Man (Vice Cop), Judge.....	Sam Wright
Chorus.....	The Actors

Georgie Porgie subsequently ran Off Broadway for 107 performances at the Village Arena Theatre in Greenwich Village, also directed by the author. Ron Link directed a second production of *Georgie Porgie* at the Cubiculo Theatre in Manhattan.

TIME: The present.

THE SET: Black flats frame the stage. White cubes are used as tables, chairs, a bed, etc.

ACT I

SCENE ONE

(Houselights up. As the play begins the CHORUS is in different areas of the theater, but none of the actors are onstage.)

- ACTOR ONE: The great men who in France prepared men’s minds for the coming revolution were themselves extreme revolutionists!
- ACTOR TWO: They recognized no external authority of any kind whatever!
- ACTOR THREE: Religion!
- ACTOR FOUR: Natural science!
- ACTOR FIVE: Society!
- ACTOR SIX: Political institutions!
- ACTOR TWO: Everything was subjected to the most unsparing criticism!
- ACTOR THREE: Everything must justify its existence before the judgment seat of history or give up existence!
- ACTOR FOUR: Reason became the sole measure of everything!
- ACTOR FIVE: It was the time when, as Hegel says, the world stood upon its head, first in the sense that the human head, and the principles arrived at by its thought, claimed to be the basis of all human action and association, but by and

by also in the wider sense that the reality that was in contradiction to these principles had, in fact, to be turned upside-down.

ALL: Upside-down?

ACTOR FIVE: Yes, upside-down!

ACTOR SIX: Every form of society and government then existing!

ACTOR ONE: Every old, traditional action was flung into the lumber room as irrational!

ACTOR TWO: The world had hitherto allowed itself to be led solely by prejudice!

ACTOR THREE: Everything in the past deserved only pity and contempt!

(All the ACTORS are now cynical.)

ACTOR FOUR: (Declaiming.) The kingdom of reason!

ACTOR ONE: Henceforth injustice!

ACTOR TWO: Privilege!

ACTOR THREE: Oppression!

ACTOR FOUR: Were to be superseded by eternal truth!

ACTOR ONE: Eternal right!

ACTOR TWO: Equality based on nature and the inalienable rights of man!

ALL: Inalienable what?

ACTOR TWO: Rights of man!

(End of chorus. MOM and GEORGE move to the stage. Houselights out—stage lights up. MOM puts on robe and sits. She is knitting. GEORGE has his martini and a paddle with a rubber ball attached to it. He is bouncing it up and down.)

MOM: I have a freshly baked loaf of bread.

GEORGE: What?

MOM: Nothing better than bread and butter, dear.

GEORGE: I'm not hungry, Mother.

MOM: But you said that yesterday.

GEORGE: Did I, Mother?

(MOM goes backstage and comes back with the loaf of bread.)

MOM: Just a nibble, dear?

GEORGE: No!

MOM: (Holds the bread under his nose.) Now breathe in. I'm sure it will get to your appetite buds.

GEORGE: (Scrunches up his nose.) It looks like Wonder Bread. Don't you understand that the wonder years have passed me by, Mother? I'm old—old and decrepit.

MOM: But it's homemade.

GEORGE: Ugh—it's—it's spongy and white—white—just like you.

MOM: I baked it this morning, Georgie.

GEORGE: George.

MOM: Don't you remember, Georgie? I used to bake bread every Saturday morning.

GEORGE: My name is George—fuckin' George.

MOM: Remember the deviled-ham sandwiches?

GEORGE: I'm thirty-eight years old.

MOM: You were so good—so darling!

GEORGE: Georgie, at my age.

MOM: You're still my little boy.

GEORGE: Jesus!

MOM: What, Georgie?

GEORGE: Nothing, nothing, nothing.

MOM: Darling, in this day and age, forty-four is very, very young.

GEORGE: Will you go to bed so I can snort some coke and watch my dirty movie?

MOM: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs?

GEORGE: Yeah, they're having a gang bang. Those dwarfs! (Holds up his right arm to show the length of their penises.)

MOM: You always gave your deviled-ham sandwiches to that sweet little pickaninny who had her kinky hair in six little braids. What was her name, Georgie?

GEORGE: What the fuck are you talking about?

MOM: Alice! Alice Smallwood!

GEORGE: I gave them to her because I couldn't stand Underwood Deviled Ham sandwiches then and I can't stand them now.

MOM: You love Underwood Deviled Ham, Georgie.

GEORGE: I have a secret, Mother dear.

MOM: Do you remember? It was back in the Depression when—

GEORGE: Will you please listen, goddammit!

MOM: I am, Georgie.

GEORGE: There is something very, very important I—

MOM: Do you remember the carnival, Georgie?

GEORGE: Mother, will you puh-lease—?

MOM: It was about six months after Charlie died. Your father.

GEORGE: Your son is a screaming faggot, Mother dear.

MOM: You must remember the miniature golf course, Georgie?

GEORGE: I'm queer, Mother.

MOM: It was in the center of the carnival, and it was surrounded by enormous chunks of glass that looked like diamonds. I wanted to take you on the Ferris wheel and into the funhouse, but all you wanted to do was admire the enormous chunks of glass.

GEORGE: I'm a homosexual, Mother dear.

MOM: (Dreamily.) That is all you wanted to do, Georgie.

GEORGE: I'm a degenerate!

MOM: That's nice, dear.

GEORGE: Now will you puh-lease—puh-lease leave me alone so I can watch my pornographic movie?

MOM: Remember, Georgie?

GEORGE: (As a cheerleader.) It's great to be gay, yay, yay, yay!

MOM: Georgie?

GEORGE: I'm going to change my name to Georgette!

MOM: Remember what you said?

GEORGE: I want a butch man with a big dick!

MOM: You thought the emerald-colored glass was real, and you said—and you said—

GEORGE: "When I grow up and become a famous author, I'm going to buy you a dress made of emeralds." Look, Mother, would you like me to tape that crummy little speech and give it to you on Mother's Day?

MOM: After we left the miniature golf course, we went to the fat-lady concession, and the barker let us in for free, and when we came out, he filled your pockets with nickels and dimes, and—

GEORGE: He was hot for your pussy!

MOM: What about the red candy apple?

GEORGE: The worm in it reminds me of one of my rough-trade tricks.

MOM: Would you like an Alka-Seltzer?

GEORGE: In this day and age? You must be shining me on.

MOM: Doing what, Georgie?

(GEORGE takes a couple of pills from pillbox and downs them with his martini.)

GEORGE: Now just give your sweet, little Georgie ten minutes and she—oops—he'll feel absolutely stunning! Oh, just a smidgeon of compressed happiness to get me over that excruciatingly nice man who ran the fat-lady concession at the carnival. Do you honestly remember him, Mother, the way he really was—after a hot piece of ass?

MOM: Are you being a naughty boy, Georgie?

GEORGE: Vulva! Pussy! Cunt!

MOM: I just know you're hungry, Georgie.

GEORGE: What about the next day, Mother dear?

MOM: What next day, Georgie?

GEORGE: When Miss Fat-Lady Concession from the carnival came for the payoff. He had a pointed nose like the Wicked Witch of the West and curlicues of hair coming out of his nostrils that were covered with seaweed-colored snot. We were living in that lice-infested railroad flat on California Street. All the time he was there I stared out the window at the stupid cable cars. I could hear the two of you like pigs in heat.

MOM: (Suddenly her eyes are blazing as she finally looks at GEORGE.) If you'd stop filling your body with chemicals and martinis, you might begin to remember what really happened. Yes, Georgie, he did come over the next day. He

knocked on the door but I didn't answer. He kept knocking and calling out. We were very, very quiet. I was holding you in my arms and kissing you, and finally he went away, and you were so happy—so happy. We took the money he had filled your pockets with, and we went to see Lana Turner in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.

GEORGE: Bullshit! Next you're going to tell me I'm an immaculate conception.

MOM: It wasn't easy—a woman all alone.

GEORGE: You were even fucking around when Daddy was alive. What about that music professor who was always jerking off over Schicklgruber?

MOM: He was a kindly old gentleman who gave you trombone lessons for free.

GEORGE: He took it out in trade.

MOM: He gave them for free because we were so poor.

GEORGE: At the moment it really doesn't matter, Mother. I'm beginning to feel that I'm in the best of all possible worlds. (Sips his martini and then toasts MOM.) How fabulous! Mother and daughter—reminiscing.

MOM: Georgie, you're such a card!

GEORGE: Since you'll fuck anything in pants, why don't you stay with me and watch my dirty movie? Two gorgeous weightlifters.

MOM: I'll fix you a delicious deviled-ham sandwich, and then I have to go to work on the graveyard shift.

GEORGE: Oh, Mother, you're such a martyr.

(Stage lights out. Houselights up on CHORUS in the audience.)

ACTOR ONE: We know today that this kingdom of reason was nothing more than the idealized kingdom of the bourgeoisie.

ACTOR TWO: That this eternal right found its realization in bourgeois justice.

ACTOR THREE: That this equality reduced itself to bourgeois equality before the law.

ACTOR FOUR: That bourgeois property was proclaimed as one of the essential rights of man.

ACTOR ONE: Did you say property?

ACTOR TWO: It became a natural law.

ACTOR THREE: Life, liberty, and the pursuit of property.

SCENE TWO

(MOM and GEORGE exit. Actors change the set. Blackout. Lights slowly come up on the STATUE, a totally naked black actor, who is standing motionless on a red box. Sitting stage right of him is MARVIN. He is reading *The Wall Street Journal*. MARVIN looks at his watch, frowns, and shakes his head. STEVE comes dancing down center aisle. Dances onto the stage, then performs his dance for MARVIN, who continues to read the paper.)

STEVE: Soooo? What do you think?

MARVIN: About what?

STEVE: My dancing—better, huh?

MARVIN: (Reading the paper.) I'm reading the paper.

STEVE: No kidding! (Does a few more dance steps.) Whewie! Really hot! (Takes off his T-shirt. He is naked to the waist. No answer from MARVIN.) I said it's really hot out!

MARVIN: Mmmm. Supposed to rain.

STEVE: Marvin?

MARVIN: What is it?

STEVE: You want me to do it again?

MARVIN: Do what again?

STEVE: My new dance routine.

MARVIN: All right—what is it now, Steve?

STEVE: Marvin, who the fuck do you think you're fooling? Come on! It's four o'clock in the morning and you're sitting there like—well, shit, man, you know you're just sitting there waiting!

MARVIN: Waiting?

STEVE: Yeah, waiting to see what time I come in. It's exactly four-seventeen A.M. Does that make you happy?

MARVIN: Steve, I'm not in the mood for an argument!

STEVE: So why aren't you in bed?

MARVIN: For the very simple reason I couldn't sleep.

STEVE: Why is it that every time I go out, you just happen to be up waiting for me? Come on, answer that one!

MARVIN: I am?

STEVE: Yes, you are, and you know it.

MARVIN: What was he like?

STEVE: Oh, brother, here we go!

MARVIN: Now you're going to tell me you didn't pick up a trick. Is that correct, Steven?

STEVE: You really want to know?

MARVIN: No, not really.

STEVE: (Paces back and forth. Does a pirouette.) Okay, I'll tell you then.

MARVIN: Look, let's just forget it.

STEVE: I'm going to—I'm going to tell you the truth.

MARVIN: That will be a first time.

STEVE: You don't fool me—you're scared to death of the truth.

MARVIN: Look who's talking about the truth!

STEVE: (As he does an arabesque.) He was a nigger.

(The head of the STATUE turns and looks at STEVE.)

MARVIN: That's all you dig, isn't it?

STEVE: (Motionless.) Black and beautiful. You should've seen him, Marvie-boy. What a groove. Seven feet one—two hundred and fifty pounds of solid muscle, and he tore me a new asshole. Now does that make you feel any better?

MARVIN: Do you feel satisfied now that you've had your giant pacifier?

STEVE: I feel great! (Does a battement dégagé, and ends up kissing the arm of the STATUE.)

MARVIN: (Sarcastic.) You are hilarious. (Pause.) I have to be up at seven.

STEVE: So go to bed.

MARVIN: We can't go on like this, Steven.

STEVE: (Mimics MARVIN.) "We can't go on like this, Steven!" Shit, Marvin, like what?

MARVIN: We've got to settle this once and for all and—and it might as well be now!

STEVE: You really got a fantasy going, don't you? You believe I'm fucking every time I go out, don't you? (Does a grand jeté.)

MARVIN: Will you stop that—that—that—

STEVE: (As he does another grand jeté.) I'm auditioning for Jerome Robbins next week, and I'm—(Pause.) You really do believe that, don't you?

MARVIN: Believe what?

STEVE: So—so I was down in the Village at this bar near the docks and I had a few beers, but that is all. I was just enjoying myself—wasn't thinking about picking up a trick at all. I talked to this old troll with a white beard—said he was a poet. In fact, he tried to sell me one of his poems. I ended up giving him a quarter. I thought of inviting him over so he could meet you. I know you'd groove on him—he's a real intellectual!

MARVIN: Oh, at four o'clock in the morning?

STEVE: Christ, Marvin, does everything have to be sex?

MARVIN: For you it does. Absolutely everything.

STEVE: Oh, I see, everything!

MARVIN: If you'd read a book once in a while, you might stop being so compulsive.

STEVE: That's your answer to life: read a book!

MARVIN: I didn't say that.

STEVE: (Reaches into his pocket.) I've got his phone number right here. You want to call him?

MARVIN: I'll call him at—(Looks at his watch.) four thirty-five in the morning and ask him if he made it with you?

STEVE: (As he holds out a piece of paper.) So call him later.

MARVIN: What difference does it make? You were out all night, Steve!

STEVE: I was home last night.

MARVIN: Big deal. I really don't care if you're getting browned by every Tom, Dick, and—

STEVE: (Laughs sardonically.) You don't care. That's hilarious. Why the fuck do you think I lie to you all the time? Why?

MARVIN: This is going to be a beauty. Why?

STEVE: Because you're so damned jealous. Hell, all we did was—

MARVIN: Forget it. I'm going to bed. (Throws down *The Wall Street Journal*. Moves stage left.)

STEVE: So I have to sleep on the couch?

MARVIN: I'm all for it.

STEVE: Okay, Marv. Let's have it out—right now.

MARVIN: So tell me—what have you been really doing until—? (Looks out the window.) It's getting light. Some guy on his way to work.

STEVE: You know, it might be a good idea if I split for a couple of months.

MARVIN: Going home to Mommy and Daddy?

STEVE: You know I can't.

MARVIN: You can't?

STEVE: Christ, you don't even remember that they kicked me out of the house when I was sixteen because—

MARVIN: Of course I remember, now that I think of it—they caught you in bed with your older brother. I bet you seduced him.

STEVE: You know damned well he forced me to go down on him.

MARVIN: Steve, I don't believe anything that comes out of your mouth.

STEVE: I see! I see! You want me to split—for good?

MARVIN: Can you think of another solution?

STEVE: I just did.

MARVIN: But it's no solution!

STEVE: Maybe it isn't but I want to change, I really do. I want to stay home and read a book or watch television, but I can't sit still. I got this thing inside me—I'm the happiest when I'm dancing or just moving—rushing, really going somewhere, and I don't care where it is or what it is.

STEVE: You are so full of malarkey. You—

(STEVE dances over to MARVIN and tries to kiss him. MARVIN jerks away.)

STEVE: You're the only one I've ever cared for—ever loved. Before you—heck, you're the only one I ever loved in my whole life.

MARVIN: Just stop it. Next I'll get the tears. I'm not falling for that crap—not anymore.

STEVE: My feelings are crap? Okay, Marvin, I'll leave—right now—right now!

MARVIN: You want to—?

STEVE: Right this second.

(STEVE grabs his shirt and starts to put it on.)

MARVIN: If that's the way you want it.

STEVE: I'm splitting! I'll pick up my things in the morning.

MARVIN: So we can have another big scene?

STEVE: I'll come when you're at work.

MARVIN: (Points to the STATUE.) Don't forget to take that.

STEVE: You want me to—?

MARVIN: Leave your keys in the mail slot.

STEVE: (Points to the STATUE.) Look, it's half yours.

MARVIN: I don't want it.

STEVE: So I'll take it.

MARVIN: Take it now!

STEVE: Now?

MARVIN: That's what I said.

STEVE: Wow! (Begins to laugh wildly.)

MARVIN: What's so funny?

STEVE: Do you have a thing, baby!

MARVIN: Oh, I see some brilliant truth is about to emerge from the mouth from the drop-out from high school.

STEVE: You are so—so middle-class!

MARVIN: Yes, and I'm proud of it.

STEVE: I just figured it out. I really did and I don't have a book. I did it all by myself. Now—listen—if I dug middle-class faggots who work on Madison Avenue, you wouldn't be uptight. That statue bugs the living shit out of you because it's black. All right, now I'm going to give you the absolute truth. Yeah. I was out with a beautiful jig. I left him about a half-hour ago and I've still got his beautiful smell on me. It's wonderful, Marvie-baby. You want a sniff?

(He grabs MARVIN and kisses him.)

MARVIN: (Jerks away. Wipes his mouth. Rushes across the room.) The filth is finally coming out. All this—you think you have to degrade yourself with a colored guy because—

STEVE: Colored? What color, Marvie?

MARVIN: You are loaded with guilt!

STEVE: That's profound. Guilt! Tell me, do you know any human being who isn't? What about you, baby? Why haven't you ever hit the sack with a black man? You scared it will rub off?

MARVIN: I think you better leave now.

STEVE: Don't worry, I'm going.

MARVIN: You can find some other middle-class sucker to support you.

STEVE: I was waiting for that.

MARVIN: So you're interested in the truth, Steve? Truth number one! I pay the rent, the gas, the electricity, and I buy all the food. Truth number two. I support you while you bend over for every guy in the city.

STEVE: Correction. It's for every black man with a big cock.

MARVIN: Okay! I stand corrected.

STEVE: (Holding up his right hand.) We've finally found the truth!

(Lights go out on STEVE and MARVIN. The only light is a spot on the STATUE.

Houselights up on the CHORUS in the audience.)

ACTOR ONE: The demand for equality was no longer limited to political rights!

ACTOR TWO: It was extended also to the social conditions of individuals!

ACTOR THREE: It was not simply class privileges that were to be abolished, but class distinctions themselves!

ACTOR FOUR: An ascetic communism, denouncing all the pleasures of life. Spartan was the first form of the new teaching!

ACTOR ONE: Then came the three great Utopians!

ACTOR TWO: Saint-Simon!

ACTOR THREE: Fourier!

ACTOR FOUR: And—Owen!

ACTOR ONE: They do not claim to emancipate a particular class to begin with, but all humanity at once!

ACTOR TWO: They wish to bring in the kingdom of reason and eternal justice!

ACTOR THREE: Groovy, man, groovy!

ALL: Eternal justice?

(Blackout.)

SCENE THREE

(The ACTORS clear the stage. Lights up on the bare stage. INA is playing hopscotch.

GEORGE comes down the center aisle. He has a bubble kit, and is blowing bubbles over the heads of the audience. He sings.)

GEORGE: There is nothin' finah, in the state of Carolina, than Ina, my Ina Lee!

(GEORGE moves onstage and covers the stage with bubbles. INA stops playing hopscotch and plays with the bubbles.)

INA: Let me do it, Georgie!

GEORGE: I want to blow some more!

INA: They're beautiful.

GEORGE: Here, I'll blow a big one. (He does.)

INA: I bet I can blow a bigger one.

GEORGE: Okey-dokey. Here. (Hands INA the bubble kit.) Go on.

INA: Let me, uh—(Tries to blow a bubble and fails.)

GEORGE: Here, let me show you. It's easy!

INA: I don't want to blow any bubbles.

GEORGE: Then give it back. (Takes the bubble kit and blows a big bubble.)

INA: What are you really doing?

GEORGE: Blowing bubbles, Ina.

INA: I know you. You're up to something.

GEORGE: No, I ain't!

INA: This isn't the way you go home.

GEORGE: I go home different ways.

INA: So go!

GEORGE: I can stay here if I want to. It's a free country.

INA: That's how much you know.

GEORGE: I'll stay here as long as I want to.

INA: I wanna know why.

GEORGE: Because. That's why.

INA: That's no reason. You're a dumbbell!

GEORGE: I am not.

INA: Come on, play hopscotch with me.

GEORGE: That's a sissy game—for girls.

INA: You know I'll beat you.

GEORGE: Does Joe play hopscotch with you?

INA: None of your beeswax, Georgie.

GEORGE: I'll bet that isn't all Joe plays with you!

INA: What do you mean by that?

GEORGE: I mean, it isn't only Joe who plays with you. It's Ernie, and Big Bruno, and—

INA: You are—it's nothing but—but—

GEORGE: (Gesturing obscenely.) Here, pussy! Pussy! Pussy! Pussy!

INA: You just stop that or—

GEORGE: Let me see one of your dirty comic books, Ina.

INA: I don't know what you are—

GEORGE: Joe showed me the one you gave him with Superman doing it to Lois Lane, and—

INA: All right, but—but I'm not going to show it to you because you're a—you know what! Go back to your dancing school.

GEORGE: Joe does it to you, doesn't he?

INA: (Mimics GEORGE.) "Joe does it to you, doesn't he?" Now let me tell you something, *Georgie Porgie*—what Joe told me. What Joe told me about you.

GEORGE: He didn't tell you nothing.

INA: He told me all about you, *Georgie Porgie*. How you—(Giggles.)

GEORGE: What? What?

INA: What happened between you and Joe in the cloak room after Civics.

GEORGE: What are you talking about?

INA: Everyone knows you got goo-goo eyes for Joe.

GEORGE: I do not. I just think he's a good soccer player, that's all.

INA: Joe told me what happened in the cloak room!

GEORGE: He didn't tell you nothin'.

INA: He told us all about you, *Georgie Porgie*! He told us what you did to him. We all know, don't we, boys?

(All the ACTORS run up onstage. They grab GEORGE and drag him center stage.

They make a circle around him, holding hands—they skip around him.)

ACTOR ONE: *Georgie Porgie*!

ACTOR TWO: Puddin' an' pie!

ACTOR THREE: Kissed the girls and made them cry!

ACTOR FOUR: When the girls came out to play—

ACTOR ONE: *Georgie Porgie* ran away!

ALL: *Georgie Porgie*, puddin' an' pie, kissed the girls and made them cry. When the girls came out to play, *Georgie Porgie* ran away!

(They skip around GEORGE a couple more times. Then they come downstage of GEORGE, hiding him from the audience. INA gets a red shawl and a large picture hat and puts them on GEORGE. Then the ACTORS part, revealing GEORGE to the audience.)

INA: (Faces audience.) Joe? Joe? Come and see the pretty little girl.

(The ACTORS move downstage. They form a line facing the audience. This chorus is done very precisely and very fast.)

ACTOR ONE: Yes, Fourier!

ACTOR TWO: Fourier was the first to declare that in any given society, the degree of woman's emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation!

ACTOR THREE: As Kant introduces into natural science the idea of the ultimate destruction of the earth, Fourier introduced into historical science that of the ultimate destruction of the human race.

(GEORGE moves downstage in woman's hat and shawl. Stamps his foot.)

ALL: The ultimate destruction of the human race!

SCENE FOUR

(The MAN is leaning against an upstage flat. He is wearing skin-tight jeans and a T-shirt that is too small for his bulging muscles. GEORGE moves slowly up the center aisle to the stage. GEORGE stops, looks into an imaginary shop window without looking at the MAN.)

GEORGE: Nice lookin' leather jacket there.

MAN: Huh? I'm not wearing a leather jacket.

GEORGE: In the window.

MAN: (Looks.) Too many zippers. (Pause.) Got a smoke?

GEORGE: Uh—they're Pall Malls.

MAN: Okay.

GEORGE: (Gives the MAN a cigarette. Lights it for him.) I bet you smoke Lucky Strikes or Camels.

MAN: Bum a smoke once in awhile.

GEORGE: So what are you up to?

MAN: I got a coupla hours to kill.

GEORGE: Oh—really?

MAN: What time you got?

GEORGE: (Giggles nervously.) All the time in the world. (Looks at clock on the fourth wall.) Um—(Looks at watch.) fifteen minutes after the bars close. Uh—four-fifteen.

MAN: A stinking hour and a half to wait on the goddammed Greyhound.

GEORGE: Port Authority, huh?

MAN: Six o'clock.

GEORGE: (Studies his watch.) All that time to kill?

MAN: I guess so.

GEORGE: I'll bet you're in the service.

MAN: The Navy.

GEORGE: Where you stationed?

MAN: Norfolk.

GEORGE: The asshole of the Navy.

MAN: Still is.

GEORGE: You live here?

MAN: Brooklyn.

GEORGE: Oh. You married?

MAN: Not that stupid.

GEORGE: Oh.

MAN: Maybe you know a couple of whores?

GEORGE: (Giggles.) Me? You got to be kidding.

MAN: I'd like to turn on.

GEORGE: I don't have any grass.

MAN: You got any beer at your pad?

GEORGE: I only have some vodka.

MAN: (A long look.) What do you—?

GEORGE: You don't have to do anything.

MAN: Then what the hell do you want me to come to your pad for?

GEORGE: You know what I—what I mean.

MAN: I don't know what you want.

GEORGE: Would you like a blueprint?

MAN: (Starts to leave.) Forget it. I'll see you around.

GEORGE: (Follows him.) Hell, all you have to do is lie back and I, uh—(Pause.)

MAN: You'll what?

GEORGE: This is, uh—damned stupid, you know? Hell, you're a real rugged-looking guy and I wouldn't want you to be a queer. I'm sure a lot of your buddies get a blow job when they're hard up.

MAN: You want to suck my cock?

GEORGE: I'll give you ten bucks.

(From his coat the MAN pulls out a wallet. Opens it up. There is a badge on it. Shows it to GEORGE.)

MAN: You're under arrest. (MAN takes out handcuffs.)

GEORGE: (Pulls away in shock.) I, uh—

(MAN kicks GEORGE in the balls. GEORGE doubles over and MAN gives him a karate chop to the back of his neck. GEORGE falls. MAN gets on top of him and begins beating his head against the floor. Stage lights out. Houselights up on CHORUS in the audience.)

ACTOR ONE: The development of industry upon a capitalistic basis made poverty and the misery of the working masses conditions of the existence of society.

ACTOR TWO: Cash payment became more and more, in Carlyle's phrase, "the sole nexus between man and man."

ACTOR THREE: Formerly, the feudal vices had openly stalked about in broad daylight!

ACTOR FOUR: Though not eradicated, they were now, at any rate, thrust into the background.

ACTOR ONE: In their stead, the bourgeois vices, hitherto practiced in secret, began to blossom all the more luxuriantly.

ACTOR TWO: Trade became, to a greater and greater extent, cheating.

ACTOR THREE: Oppression by force was replaced by corruption.

ACTOR FOUR: The sword, as the first social lever, was replaced by gold.

ALL: Yeah, gold, gold, gold!

SCENE FIVE

(All the lights come up on the stage and in the theater. We are in a courtroom. The MAN places a chair downstage. He holds up his hand.)

ACTOR ONE: (From the audience.) Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

MAN: I do. (Pause.) Yes, surely, in my own words. I'd like to say that I feel embarrassed about the language used by the defendant, but I realize that for justice to be done, I must say it as it is. I was standing on the southwest corner of 41st Street and Eighth Avenue at exactly four-ten A.M. on the morning of August 17th, 1968. I was waiting for Detective O'Connor, who was checking out the men's room at the Port Authority bus terminal. My job on the vice squad is to check the bars immediately across the street for degenerates. I would like to describe the bar where I first met the defendant. The graffiti in the men's room is disgusting, and the walls are covered with sperm where the degenerates have masturbated. It is not unusual to find one of the perverts having oral copulation with one of the servicemen. They ply these young men with drinks and money. Your Honor, I was using a urinal when the defendant entered. He stood next to me and kept looking down at my penis and licking his lips. I left immediately

and he followed me. This is the part that I dislike speaking about in an open court, but I do realize it is my duty. The defendant said—(Looks into little black book.) quote, “Hello. It’s hot out. I’ll bet you feel the same.” I answered, “Oh?” He said, quote, “Would you like a blow job? I’m the best cocksucker in town!” I have only been on the vice squad for a few months, and I was shocked. However, I answered, “Is that all you do?” He said, “Anything and everything. Would you like to shove it up my ass?” That’s when I took out my badge and put the defendant under arrest, Your Honor. He resisted, but I subdued him in the manner taught at the Police Academy, and he was not injured. On the way to the station, the defendant tried to bribe me in the presence of Detective O’Connor. I refused the bribe.

JUDGE: Will you rise for sentencing?

(GEORGE rises.)

JUDGE: You have been found guilty on two counts. The first count is lewd language in a public place. The second count, of trying to bribe an officer of the law. On count one, thirty days in jail or one hundred dollars. On count two, six months in the county jail.

(Stage lights out. Houselights up on CHORUS in audience.)

ACTOR ONE: Compared with the splendid promises of the philosophers, the social and political institutions born of the “triumph of reason” were bitterly disappointing caricatures.

ACTOR TWO: Society presented nothing but wrongs.

ACTOR THREE: To remove these was the task of reason.

ACTOR FOUR: It was necessary, then, to discover a new and more perfect system of social order.

ACT II

SCENE ONE

(The lights come up. GEORGE is lying on the bed in his shorts. He is writing in a notebook. We hear GRACE singing as she slowly walks down center aisle. She is carrying a sign that reads “STOP THE WAR.”)

GRACE: “Where have all the young men gone? Long time passing. Where have all the young men gone? Long time ago. Where have all the young men gone? Gone for soldiers, every one.”

(As GRACE reaches the stage GEORGE joins her in singing the last two lines.)

GEORGE, GRACE: “When will we ever learn? When will we ever learn?”

(GRACE carefully places the sign against the upstage wall—takes off winter coat and kisses GEORGE.)

GRACE: Hi, Georgie. Just get home?

GEORGE: ’Bout an hour. How’d it go?

GRACE: The neofascists were out in force—the rotten-egg syndrome. It was truly inspiring, though. Two hundred and fifty thousand peace marchers.

GEORGE: The radio said a hundred thousand.

GRACE: When I left the U.N. Plaza twenty minutes ago, they were still streaming in. Of course *The News* will say forty thousand, *The Nation* one hundred and fifty, and the *National Guardian* will give the actual figure.

GEORGE: Which is yours, right? (Pulls her down on the bed and kisses her.)

GRACE: That Skylar. He never fails to surprise me. (GEORGE frowns.) He doesn't have a hostile bone in his body. He kept smiling away even with the rotten egg on his face. He said it was great for the skin.

GEORGE: I must say—he's a goody two-shoes!

GRACE: (Opens her purse and takes out a copy of the *National Guardian*.) Listen to this, Georgie. It's about a leprosarium near Hanoi that was attacked by American planes, and—

GEORGE: Isn't the *Guardian* a Commie rag?

GRACE: You're thinking of the *Daily Worker*. Thirteen attacks and over one hundred buildings destroyed. (GRACE opens the *Guardian* and reads.) "Lepers who were buried after the first attacks were bombed out of their graves in subsequent attacks; some of the buried were exhumed by bombs several times."

GEORGE: Ah—the Resurrection!

GRACE: (As she shakes her head in disapproval.) Oh, Georgie. Salt of the Earth is playing in the Village. Let's go see it tomorrow.

GEORGE: Grace, I'm reading my poetry at Theatre Genesis.

GRACE: But that's in the evening. We could catch a matinee.

GEORGE: I've got to do some rewriting.

GRACE: I could see that movie twenty times

GEORGE: (Laughing.) Twenty times? Really, Grace.

GRACE: It's Brecht without irony. At first I assumed it would be a simple tale of the working man fighting the dirty capitalists, but it isn't that at all. The Mexican women have the status of beasts of burden—the men actually treat them like farm animals. The strike is progressing and then the mine company gets an injunction against the men—they can no longer picket on mine property, and since the town and their very homes belong to the company, it looks as if the strike is doomed. However, the injunction says nothing about women picketing on mine property. So the women picket and the police throw them in jail. This changes everything—this catalytic event—

GEORGE: Catalytic event?

GRACE: It redefines the man-woman relationship. The husbands begin to see their wives as human beings and, consequently, equal. The movie really says that all human beings have to love before there can be any historical progress.

GEORGE: Oh, Gracie dear, it sounds pretty pat to me! (Pulls her flat on the bed and gets on top of her.)

GRACE: Pretty what?

GEORGE: Pat—and very, very dull.

GRACE: That's because you have no social consciousness!

GEORGE: And you have everything in your head—not in your heart.

GRACE: You're not going to bring me down, Georgie.

GEORGE: (As he kisses her neck.) Mmmm.

GRACE: You feel like a goody?

GEORGE: Yes, I do.

GRACE: Let's go to Schrafft's.

GEORGE: You know I detest that—that emporium of middle-class, overweight, Jewish ladies.

GRACE: They have pure cream in their coffee.

GEORGE: Big deal. Aren't you exhausted from all that marching?

GRACE: I'm full of energy.

GEORGE: (Gives up on making love to GRACE. Holds up the notebook.) Want to read it?

GRACE: Read what?

GEORGE: My new poem. I think it's the best one I've ever written.

GRACE: You always say that.

GEORGE: Well, do you?

GRACE: Not right now, Georgie.

GEORGE: Grace, can I ask you a question?

GRACE: Be my guest.

GEORGE: How come you're always slobbering at the mouth to read Skylar Morris's stuff? Why is that, Grace?

GRACE: Oh, Georgie, you—

GEORGE: Why is it that every time you put me down, you call me "Georgie"? Come on, tell me!

GRACE: Which question would you like me to answer, Georgie?

GEORGE: Be my guest, Gracie Allen!

GRACE: I'm going to Schrafft's!

(GRACE gets off the edge of bed and moves to chair. Takes off her skirt and puts on another one.)

GEORGE: (Kneels on the bed.) Skylar's writing has a Brechtian quality. Skylar is on the verge of greatness. Skylar leads an existential existence with egg yolk on his face.

GRACE: Do you honestly believe it will make any difference in your writing if Skylar's a great writer or a lousy hack? Georgie, if you—

GEORGE: George, goddammit!

GRACE: You set yourself up as a Georgie and then you expect me to call you George? Fascinating.

GEORGE: I'm glad you think so.

GRACE: It's what's inside you that counts—what you can produce honestly.

GEORGE: Maybe if my wife had a little confidence in me, I might become a great writer.

GRACE: You want blind loyalty? I can't give you that! That's why I want you to see Salt of the Earth. You'd never be any good if I gave you that. Try to understand what I'm saying. Do you remember when you walked out of Doctor Ginsberg's Creative Writing class at the New School for Social Research? It was because they gave you a critique of one of your short stories. You don't want to face what's inside—your feelings. You don't want an honest appraisal—all you want is praise!

GEORGE: Do you know what you are like, Gracie dear? Would you like an honest appraisal?

GRACE: I've never said you don't have potential. Why, you're ten times the writer you were when I met you.

GEORGE: That's a left-handed compliment.

GRACE: George, for someone who didn't finish high school—

GEORGE: I know, the gal who got her Master's took ignorant George under her wing.

GRACE: We're off and running.

GEORGE: Oh?

GRACE: Have you forgotten how it was when we first met? How terrified you were of me because I'm a woman?

GEORGE: Because you're a woman?

GRACE: When we met, you were emotionally cut off from over half the human race.

GEORGE: Now you're psychoanalyzing me.

GRACE: How many times have you told me how much I remind you of your mother, who deserted you when you were eight years old?

GEORGE: Here we go again.

GRACE: You've got to trust me, Georgie! I'm not going to desert you like your mother did.

GEORGE: Thank you ever, ever so much.

GRACE: You're quite welcome, but it's the truth.

GEORGE: Yes, you have a monopoly on the truth! Gracie brought *Georgie Porgie* out of his shell and—and—

GRACE: I'm sorry, your phony cynicism can't hide the awful truth.

GEORGE: You're just pissed because you couldn't change this screaming faggot into a skirt-chasing, hairy-chested hetero.

GRACE: (Laughs.) George, you are—

GEORGE: (With withering sarcasm.) Speaking of the truth, why did you really demonstrate? Was it for peace in Vietnam or was it for the man with the sky-blue eyes?

GRACE: Jealousy, how it tortures thee.

GEORGE: Skylar Morris—the uptight cop-out artist. You talk about me and yet you just won't give me a chance. You don't want to see anything, do you, Gracie dear? What about Sky's latent homosexuality? It's dripping out of his ears.

GRACE: It destroys you because Sky is a real man, something you would love to be.

GEORGE: Last week—Sky was over here. I was in my underwear and he couldn't keep his eyes off of me. Thank God he's not my type.

GRACE: I see. Do you really think he was making a pass at—?

GEORGE: I know that look.

GRACE: You are—I don't have the words to—

GEORGE: He said, "What have you got in those shorts of yours, a Pepsi bottle?"

GRACE: All right! All right! I give in. The whole world is queer. Heterosexuality has gone down the tube of history. Andy Warhol and the fags of Madison Avenue have taken over the world. Does that make you feel nice and warm, *Georgie Porgie*?

GEORGE: Gracie, tell me. Why—why is it at the moment I start making love to you, you turn off? When I'm hard, you want it soft. Soft and spongy. Is Skylar Morris like that, Grace dear? Is that why you dig him?

GRACE: You—you—really are disgusting!

GEORGE: Would you like me to put on my Max Factor and my high heels?

GRACE: You are sick. You are—

GEORGE: (Grabs his pants and holds them out to GRACE.) My pants and—and my balls. (Hand to mouth.) Correction—you already got them.

GRACE: I see. There's no one left who isn't latent or queer. You wonder why I cut you off the other night? Are you really that desensitized by your faggotry? What on earth do you think a woman is? Dear God, love is more than an erection! I'm not a hole. I'm a woman, George. I'm not one of your faggots who thinks a penis is a weapon.

GEORGE: Boy, are you something else. You—

GRACE: George, did you ever hear of such a thing as a man and a woman being in love? I'm talking about really caring for each other—of giving and taking and having children and being a part of the pattern of life. Love, George, love! It may sound square and perverted to your inverted mind, but it's what makes the world go 'round. It's what gives reason to all of this. You might call it a group, a universal consciousness. And—heterosexual love just happens to be the way things are on the planet Earth.

GEORGE: Maybe I should pack my bags and take off for Mars.

GRACE: Cynicism is not going to get you—

GEORGE: Maybe the U.N. should create an enclave on Mars for faggots. Would you like that, Grace? You want social consciousness? You're the one who's prejudiced. Despite all your pretensions to being a revolutionary, you're plain middle-class! Your attitude toward gay men is middle-class bullshit. You're a complete victim of the military-industrial complex—that's what's so ironic. You play right into their hands, Gracie dear!

GRACE: It's so simple—simple! Why can't you see it? You want to wallow in your infantile dream world—playing with boys instead of acting up to the demands of being a real man. That's where it's at, being a man and accepting the horrors

and terrors of that position in the world we live in. Don't you know where it leads to? Fascism, George! When people are cut off from the mainstream of life, when they're alienated from nature, when they're fighting it, what else can there be? Don't you see, your reality is twisted, perverted. I feel sorry for you—sorry! Sorry! Sorry!

(Both GEORGE and GRACE are screaming hysterically.)

GEORGE: You feel sorry for me? (Grabs her and presses her against the wall.) Grace, do you know what a fag hag is? Do you? It's you, dear. It's a woman who's afraid of a real man. It's a woman who really wants another woman, but she's too frightened to admit she's queer, so she picks on a faggot like me or a potential one like Skylar. Baby, the fascists of this world are people like you, who don't know where they're at, who are too terrified to admit what they really dig! The sick latents are the ones who go out and make the wars, Gracie dear. And that's you, baby, a fag hag—all the way down the line! Fag hag! Fag hag! Fag hag!

(Stage lights go down quickly. Houselights up on CHORUS in the audience.)

ACTOR ONE: It is just as impossible to determine absolutely the moment of death, for physiology proves that death is not an instantaneous, momentary phenomenon, but a very protracted process.

ACTOR TWO: In like manner, every organized being is every moment the same and not the same; every moment he assimilates matter supplied from without, and gets rid of other matter; every moment some cells of his body die, and others build themselves anew; in a longer or shorter time, the matter of his body is completely renewed and is replaced by other molecules of matter; so that every organized being is always himself, and yet something other than himself.

ALL: So that every organized being is always himself, and yet something other than himself.

SCENE TWO

(FINLEY's well appointed apartment on Sutton Place. The upstage wall is a mirror that reflects the action. A fancy French telephone—a Ming vase with fresh roses in it. FINLEY is seated, wearing an expensive smoking jacket. He sips a martini. We hear a flushing toilet. KEN enters slowly, buttoning his fly. He is wearing a beat-up leather jacket and tight blue jeans. He looks in mirror. He slowly combs his hair and admires himself.)

FINLEY: I presume everything came out all right?

(KEN makes a grunting sound as he continues to comb his hair. He wipes the comb on his butt and puts it in his back pocket. He slowly moves toward FINLEY. He stands next to him.)

FINLEY: Would you care for a drink, uh—uh—?

KEN: Ken Kelly. (Reaches into FINLEY's smoking jacket and takes a cigarette. He puts it between his lips and then looks at FINLEY, who takes a lighter and lights KEN's cigarette.)

FINLEY: Irish, I presume?

KEN: Shanty.

FINLEY: (Stands.) Vodka, bourbon?

(KEN frowns, shakes his head, and plops down into FINLEY's chair.)

FINLEY: Would you care for a cool gin and tonic?

KEN: (Puts his feet on the coffee table and begins to shake it slowly.) You got any Bud?

FINLEY: I beg your pardon?

KEN: Budweiser! Beer! (He is shaking the table very hard. The Ming vase is shaking.

FINLEY takes the vase and moves it to another table.)

FINLEY: I'll call Gristede's. They'll deliver it posthaste.

KEN: Forget it!

FINLEY: No bother at all.

KEN: Fuck it!

FINLEY: That would be a neat accomplishment.

(KEN gives him a dirty look.)

FINLEY: Why did you ask for a beer when you didn't want it?

KEN: I'm a head, man.

FINLEY: Ahead of what?

KEN: H-E-A-D. Head!

FINLEY: I still don't—?

KEN: I turn on!

FINLEY: Marijuana?

KEN: Acapulco gold, T.H.C., pure sunshine acid, S.T.P. You name it.

FINLEY: It's rather obvious that I'm from another generation!

KEN: My generation calls it "straight"!

FINLEY: Me, straight? Hardly.

KEN: You've got status quo written all over you.

FINLEY: That's the best compliment I've had all night.

KEN: You got anything to eat?

FINLEY: I presume you're talking about regular food.

KEN: (Slaps his leg.) You're right here in the twentieth century.

FINLEY: I'll have a look-see. (Exits. Speaks from offstage.) I have some leftover avocat et oeufs à la mousse de crabe.

KEN: What the fuck is that?

FINLEY: Avocado and eggs with a crab mousse.

KEN: How about a sandwich?

FINLEY: I have some Italian V-2 hot salami.

KEN: That's for the greasy dagos!

FINLEY: Would you prefer a simple chicken leg?

KEN: Yeah.

FINLEY: Some silverware and a napkin—?

KEN: Hand it to me.

(FINLEY re-enters. He has the chicken leg on a linen napkin. He places it on coffee table next to KEN, who ignores the napkin as he picks up the chicken leg. He devours the chicken leg as he talks. When he is finished, he licks his fingers and wipes his hands on his pants.)

KEN: What do you think of Nietzsche?

FINLEY: (Startled.) Uh—

KEN: So—?

FINLEY: I beg your pardon?

KEN: The German philosopher.

FINLEY: Oh, uh—(KEN grinds his cigarette out on the floor. FINLEY delicately picks up the butt with a napkin and puts it in an ashtray.) Well—his theory of the innate superiority of man over women is quite fascinating.

KEN: Leave it to your kind to latch onto something like that.

FINLEY: I'm not quite sure that I—

KEN: You dig him?

FINLEY: Well, uh—I don't quite consider him my favorite philosopher.

KEN: Is that because he believed in life here—rather than a life situated in a world beyond?

FINLEY: (Very frustrated.) I must say that I—

KEN: Who the fuck do you dig?

FINLEY: I—I am not particularly in the mood to discuss philosophy.

KEN: You groove on Spinoza?

FINLEY: Really!

KEN: He was the first philosopher to criticize the Bible and the evil of sectarian religion.

FINLEY: I happen to be a card-carrying member of the Catholic church.

KEN: (He is now sitting on the back of the chair with his feet on the seat.) Pope Paul the Sixth.

FINLEY: What about him?

KEN: Tell me about his encyclical?

FINLEY: I'm afraid I—

KEN: *Humanae Vitae*.

FINLEY: (Puts his hands to his temple and presses.) I—I—

KEN: Relax. How about Ginsberg?

FINLEY: Ugh. Rather untidy.

KEN: Did you read Howl?

FINLEY: I'm afraid not.

KEN: What about Gurdjieff?

FINLEY: What is this, the Inquisition?

KEN: Just wondering where you're at.

FINLEY: Where did you go to college?

KEN: Didn't! That's Establishment bullshit.

FINLEY: A diamond in the rough. A Jack London! How fascinating.

KEN: You're a condescending motherfucker!

FINLEY: You don't quite strike me as the type of young man who would be interested in the aesthetic side of life—you look, uh—quite elemental.

(KEN moves in on FINLEY. He is behind FINLEY, who is seated.)

KEN: You want to know something, Mr. Finley?

FINLEY: At the moment I'm not interested in a learned discussion on the relative merits of Nietzsche and/or Spinoza.

(KEN grabs FINLEY by the hair and jerks his head backwards, holding it there.)

KEN: You want to know something?

(FINLEY jerks away and rushes to the other side of the room.)

FINLEY: You're repeating yourself, young man.

KEN: (With an evil grin.) I've got something else to say!

FINLEY: Bravo!

KEN: All you faggots are alike.

FINLEY: (Moves away from KEN. Sits.) That's quite profound.

KEN: You're a fucking drag.

FINLEY: I'm sorry to disappoint you, young man, but I've never been in drag. I don't particularly go in for that fantasy.

KEN: But there's a lot of others you go for, right?

FINLEY: I don't quite—?

KEN: (Moves in on FINLEY.) Fantasies, Mr. Finley. Like the real ultimate. Did you ever blow a guy in a subway john?

FINLEY: That is enough of your—

KEN: You've dreamt about doing it. Come on—and the fuzz catch you in the act. The ultimate in degradation and humiliation. Right, Mr. Finley?

FINLEY: That is it! That is it! I want you out of here. This has gone beyond reason!

KEN: (Takes off his leather jacket and throws it on the floor.) Hah! A fuckin' sniveling pansy standing up to me! It's simple and very uncomplicated, Mr. Finley. Ken here ain't fitting into Mr. Finley's fantasy. Okay. You want the animal, right? (Shoves his ass in FINLEY's face. Strains.) I can't let go with a stinkin' fart right now. We got to build up to that fantasy! (Outlines his penis in his blue jeans.) That turn you on, Mr. Finley?

FINLEY: You—you are only an ersatz edition of Stanley Kowalski.

KEN: I bet you grooved when Brando did it.

FINLEY: I do realize it's rather difficult for a Neanderthal man like you to comprehend a civilized human being, but if you'll just walk to the door and turn the knob, you'll find yourself on Sutton Place. I'll be more than glad to give you the cab fare so you can go to your little furnished hovel. Just ask

Henderson, the doorman, to blow his little whistle. Do you think you can do that?

KEN: (Crosses the stage very slowly, like a panther. Slaps FINLEY across the face.) It's all coming out—all the shit! I never yet met a faggot who didn't try to de-ball me. You're jealous, Mr. Finley, because you can't groove—because you're not a real man! Wow!

FINLEY: You better leave right now or I'll—I'll—

KEN: Or what, pussy?

FINLEY: I—I'm going to call the police. (Crosses to the French phone.)

KEN: Mr. Tutti-Frutti, you think they're on your side? You really want the nails in your hands! Hey, let's crucify the faggot!

FINLEY: I—I can't believe what I'm seeing and hearing. I can't—

KEN: You better believe it, you fuckin' degenerate! I haven't started yet!

FINLEY: The ape thinks he's a higher form.

KEN: Where is that fuckin'—(Crosses to phone. Quickly dials a number. Speaking into the phone.) Sue baby? How's it goin'? I'll be right over. I got a hard-on.

FINLEY: Get out! Get out!

KEN: Throw on a steak!

FINLEY: Disgusting! Disgusting!

KEN: What, Sue? No—just some middle-aged faggot who's dying to have his face smashed in. You ought to see him. A miserable looking cocksucker—frightened to death of dying. Are you kiddin', Sue? Shit, babe, I wouldn't let him lick the sweat off my balls. Yeah, and heavy on the onions. (KEN hangs up.)

FINLEY: You—you are the typical American male—absolutely—completely prejudiced against the homosexual because you are terrified—terrified of what's in you.

KEN: You got the platitudes up your ass, man. Okay—I see—you're a homosexual! (Now he lets him have it.) I thought you were a fuckin' faggot cocksucker!

FINLEY: (Beginning to cry.) How dare you? How—? Do you know who I am? I make a hundred thousand a year!

KEN: I don't give a shit if you're Mao Tse-Tung—you're a miserable queer, Mr. Finley. Your life is just plain shitty and I ain't speaking figuratively. What's this bit of licking assholes, huh?

FINLEY: (Puts his hands over his ears.) Puh-lease, I—

KEN: (Grabs FINLEY by the shoulders.) Goddam! Fuckin' hungry eyes—sick eyes—looking for—seeking some constant, faggot fantasy!

FINLEY: Stop! Stop! Please—

KEN: I haven't even started, motherfucker. Hey, how about that! How about your mother? You ever thought of fuckin' her? You think maybe that's where it's at? (Laughs.) Or maybe you think you are your mother?

FINLEY: I'm warning you, you hate-filled man—you—you—

KEN: You're warning me? Hey, why don't you try being a real man? Come on! Come on! (Slaps FINLEY a couple of times, then takes a fighting stance.) Let's duke it out!

FINLEY: (Runs to the phone.) The police! I'm going to call them.

(KEN hits him, knocking him down. FINLEY crawls across the stage. KEN kicks FINLEY in the butt.)

KEN: Motherfuckin' French phone! (Throws the phone across the stage.) Come on! Stand up and fight like a real man!

FINLEY: You—you monster!

(FINLEY attacks KEN, throwing punches wildly. KEN slaps him again and again, until FINLEY is on his knees in front of KEN.)

KEN: Hey, Mr. Powder Puff! Did you play jacks with the girls?

FINLEY: (He is crying.) Oh, Kenny, don't—don't—

KEN: (As he slaps FINLEY harder and harder.) Cry, you miserable queer!

FINLEY: Oh, Kenny, Kenny!

KEN: Fuckin' crybaby!

FINLEY: (He is still sobbing.) Kenny!

KEN: (As he grabs his crotch.) You think you're worthy to touch this? It's for a real—a real woman, asshole!

FINLEY: Ooooh! Kenny! Kenny! Kenny!

(FINLEY is pressing his body against KEN's boot. He is moaning and groaning wildly.)

KEN: The name is Ken, cocksucker!

FINLEY: Ooooh! Ooooh! Ooooh!

KEN: (Slaps FINLEY.) My name is Ken!

FINLEY: Ooooh, Ken—Ken—Ken!

(KEN grabs FINLEY by the face. He coughs and spits in his face.)

FINLEY: Oh my God—ooooh my God—ooooh!

(FINLEY is gyrating his body against KEN'S boot. Finally, he has his orgasm and collapses as KEN moves calmly away and sits in the chair. KEN crosses his legs, and his body chemistry changes to that of a soft-spoken, rather subservient man. FINLEY is still kneeling as he faces downstage. His hand goes to his face. He feels the spittle—he touches it lovingly—he is at peace with himself. He slowly stands up, and now he is a commanding presence. He moves upstage and quickly writes a check. We hear the sound as he rips the check from the checkbook. He crosses to KEN and hands him the check.)

KEN: (Very polite.) Thank you, Mr. Finley.

(FINLEY picks up KEN's leather jacket and throws it at him.)

FINLEY: The wife and I are flying to London in the morning. I'll be back at the end of the month. I'll see you then.

KEN: Yes sir.

FINLEY: (Smiles for the first time.) Give my best to Sue!

KEN: Huh?

FINLEY: (Innuendo.) Your girlfriend.

KEN: Uh—right. (Awkward pause.) You takin' the kids with you?

FINLEY: They're in summer camp. (Looks at his watch.) Hmmm. Later than I thought. (Turns away.)

KEN: (Very deferential.) I look forward to seeing you at the end of the month.

(KEN exits. FINLEY freezes. Stage lights out. Houselights up on CHORUS in the audience.)

ACTOR ONE: Then it was seen that all past history, with the exception of its primitive stages, was the history of class struggle.

ACTOR TWO: That these warring classes of society are always the products of the modes of production and of exchange.

ACTOR THREE: In a word—the conditions of their time—

ACTOR FOUR: That the economic structure of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of juridical and political institutions, as well as of the religious, philosophical, and other ideas of a given historical period.

ALL: Of a given historical period.

SCENE THREE

(GEORGE and MOM's apartment. As the lights go up onstage, GEORGE and GROVER are walking down center aisle. GROVER is black and very angry looking. GEORGE is tipsy.)

GEORGE: Just—yes—this way. (The moment GEORGE gets onstage the phone rings.) Excuse me! Have a seat, uh—(Picks up the phone.) Hi, Mom. What? Oh, I just went for a walk. I'll take the pork chops out of the freezer, dear. Bye-bye. (Hangs up.) May I take your jacket?

GROVER: (Shakes his head.) You read a lot?

GEORGE: You can say that. (Awkward pause.) Would you care for a drink?

GROVER: No thank you.

GEORGE: I think I'll have one. Those three flights—exhausting. (Moves stage left and fixes himself a drink.) You're not breathing heavily. I'll bet you're an athlete. (Feels his arm.) A weightlifter?

GROVER: Nope!

GEORGE: Oh, for the life of me, I can't—I can't remember your name.

GROVER: Grover.

GEORGE: I'm George.

GROVER: I know. So?

GEORGE: So, uh—what?

GROVER: Come on.

GEORGE: You'll have to forgive me. I—

(GROVER rubs his thumb against his index finger—the sign of wanting money.)

GEORGE: I've never done anything like this before.

GROVER: Like what?

GEORGE: I've never paid anyone.

GROVER: (Laughs.) You got to be kidding me.

GEORGE: (His feathers are ruffled.) I certainly am not!

GROVER: So?

GEORGE: I, uh—I can give you five.

GROVER: Twenty!

GEORGE: I'm, uh—I don't have twenty.

GROVER: Come on, babe.

GEORGE: I'll see what I can do.

GROVER: You got some weed?

GEORGE: All out, but I've got some gin.

GROVER: Don't drink.

GEORGE: You live in the city?

GROVER: (As he looks around the room.) Yeah.

GEORGE: Um—where you from originally?

GROVER: Alabama.

GEORGE: Do you have a job?

GROVER: I drive a truck.

GEORGE: (Excited.) Oh, really? Is it an eighteen-wheeler?

GROVER: Nope.

GEORGE: I bet you're married. (GROVER nods his head.) Any children?

GROVER: Three.

GEORGE: You're very virile looking.

(GEORGE moves behind GROVER, who is seated. He runs his hands over his shoulders and down his arms. He lifts GROVER's shirt and feels his chest and then starts down toward his crotch. GROVER stands up and holds out his hand. GEORGE stands a moment, then makes up his mind. He moves to the cookie jar and takes out a bill.)

GEORGE: Here's a ten-spot.

GROVER: What do you dig?

GEORGE: Grover, I've had—well—second thoughts.

GROVER: 'Bout what?

GEORGE: Well, you're a Negro, and—

GROVER: I am?

GEORGE: I feel—well—I'm taking advantage of you.

GROVER: (Suddenly angry and very sarcastic.) So you're just giving me this money?

GEORGE: Yes, yes, I am. I—I don't know what got into me. I—

GROVER: Come here, babe!

GEORGE: Like I said—I changed my mind.

GROVER: (Grabs his crotch. Moves to GEORGE.) I know you want my black dick.

GEORGE: I don't, uh—

GROVER: I ain't got twelve inches.

GEORGE: (Mesmerized.) Oh—uh—

GROVER: (Takes GEORGE's hand and puts it on his crotch.) Grover Jones from Tuskegee, Alabama!

(GROVER is facing upstage and blocks GEORGE from the audience's view. He grabs GEORGE by the shoulders until GEORGE is kneeling. GEORGE pulls down GROVER's zipper and buries his head in GROVER's crotch. GROVER gives GEORGE a shove, moves downstage, and zips up his fly.)

GROVER: I'm not a truck driver.

GEORGE: (Flustered.) I—I really—it doesn't matter.

GROVER: Bullshit! You were eating it up. (Moves to GEORGE.) I work in a beauty parlor. I had my first experience with Whitey in a choir loft in Harlem. He came over to fix our broken-down organ pipes and ended up blowing me when I was ten years old. It was the first time I ever looked down at Whitey. By the way, I live with a very white guy in a penthouse on the Upper East Side. He thinks I'm a black stud, too.

GEORGE: (Stands up) Well, you are very, very rugged looking.

GROVER: Am I, really? (Pulls down his jacket in a very campy way. He becomes a screaming queen.) Ooooh!

GEORGE: Puh-lease, what are you—? Stop it!

GROVER: Stop what, Mary?

GEORGE: You're just trying to put me on.

GROVER: (Swishes downstage.) Really—oh, sweetie—why, all the boys on 125th Street whistle at me when I swish by. All of them—real studs, my dear.

GEORGE: Didn't you say that you lived on the Upper East Side?

GROVER: I do, Mary. I just go up to Harlem to get me a—

GEORGE: I'm sorry, Grover, my mother's coming home in just a few minutes.

GROVER: You live with your Mummy? (Picks up picture of MOM.) She out there turning a trick?

GEORGE: How dare you! How—just get out of here, dammit!

GROVER: Ooooh! (Waves his hands wildly over his head.) Oh, how rugged. You're turning me on!

GEORGE: Please? (On the verge of tears.) Please leave.

(GROVER is suddenly very masculine. He swaggers over to GEORGE.)

GROVER: Better luck next time, Whitey!

(GROVER exits down center aisle. MOM passes him as she enters.)

MOM: Hello, dear. Did you take out the pork chops? (Puts down her shopping bag.) I didn't know that Negroes were allowed in the building.

(Stage lights out. Houselights up on CHORUS in the audience.)

ACTOR ONE: The idea that all men, as men, have something in common, and to that extent they are equal, is of course primeval.

ACTOR TWO: In the most ancient, primitive communities, equality of rights could apply at most to members of the community.

ACTOR THREE: Women, slaves, and foreigners were excluded from this equality as a matter of course.

ACTOR FOUR: Among the Greeks and Romans, the inequalities of men were of much greater importance than their equality in any respect.

ACTOR ONE: Christianity knew only one point in which all men were equal.

ACTOR TWO: That all were equally born in original sin.

ACTOR THREE: Original sin?

ALL: Yes, original sin.

SCENE FOUR

(The stage is bare except for a barbell on the floor with a hundred pounds on it. We are in a gym. TONY is doing a deltoid press with two dumbbells. He stops, then poses in an imaginary, fourth-wall mirror. ALGERNON comes down the center aisle. He is wearing a leopard-skin bikini, and carrying a book and a carton of yogurt. He puts them down on a red box and begins running in place. He is quickly winded. He sits, slurping down the yogurt and eyeing TONY.)

ALGERNON: Hello, there! (No answer.) I'm Algernon.

TONY: (Mutters.) Hiya! (Continues to work out.)

ALGERNON: Do you come here regularly?

TONY: Six times a week.

ALGERNON: Actually, I only get here once in a blue moon.

TONY: What's that you're eating?

ALGERNON: Yogurt. The fellow at the desk told me to eat it—he said it would make me big and strong—just like you. (No answer from TONY.) You know lots of exercises. Maybe you could help me with my problem. My arms are like toothpicks.

TONY: You can say that again.

ALGERNON: What's the exercise you're doing—what is it for?

TONY: (Drops the dumbbells to the floor.) The delts.

ALGERNON: The what?

TONY: (Rising anger.) Deltoids.

ALGERNON: Could you show me an exercise for my, uh—toothpicks?

(TONY picks up dumbbells and demonstrates a curl. Hands the dumbbells to ALGERNON. He tries to lift the dumbbells, but fails.)

TONY: Go get lighter ones.

ALGERNON: In a minute. By the by, I have a big house on the Island, and if you want to come out some weekend, uh—you could have your own room!

TONY: What island?

ALGERNON: Fire Island, of course—right near the Pines.

TONY: Is your name really Algernon?

ALGERNON: I was named after Algernon Moncrieff, the lead character in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

TONY: I thought your name was Fruit Cup!

ALGERNON: What on earth do you mean by that?

TONY: I've seen you here before, and you know how to lift weights.

ALGERNON: (As he slurps on his yogurt.) So?

TONY: In about two minutes I'm going into the steam room. You followed me in there last week. The next time you do, I'm going to deck you. Another thing, you happen to be on the straight side of the gym. (Draws an imaginary line down the center of the stage with his foot.) That's out of bounds for you, and I don't want you starin' at me like a sick cow.

(ALGERNON grabs his yogurt and retreats stage left.)

ALGERNON: Such gorgeous hostility!

TONY: (Takes a few steps toward ALGERNON.) Get the fuck—

ALGERNON: If you cross the line, you'll turn into a faggot! (TONY moves across the invisible line.) You just did!

(TONY jumps back. He turns away, picks up skipping rope, and begins to jump rope. Muscular JACK enters. ALGERNON sits cross-legged, slurping yogurt and watching the two bodybuilders.)

JACK: Hot damn! Tony! Gimme some skin, man. (They shake hands.)

TONY: What's happenin'?

JACK: How the fuck are you?

TONY: Not feelin' any pain. (Inspects his hair.) Hey, you got a duck butt and some bleach.

JACK: The sun, man. Southern California!

TONY: Muscle Beach?

JACK: Yeah.

TONY: Lay it on me, man.

JACK: The chicks, man, they dig bodybuilders.

TONY: You get a lot of beaver, huh?

JACK: Some real juicy pussy.

TONY: You bin workin' out?

JACK: So-so. I see you knocked off a few inches—your abs—wow! Great cuts.

TONY: Five hundred sit-ups a day, every day!

JACK: Beautiful! Let me see you do an ab pose!

TONY: Naw—the fag'll groove on me.

JACK: Aw—c'mon.

(TONY puts his hands behind his head and does the pose that shows off his abdominal muscles.)

TONY: Let me have one in the gut. (JACK punches him in the stomach.) Harder!
Harder! (JACK punches him again.)

JACK: Flex your biceps.

TONY: The fag will go crazy.

JACK: C'mon. (TONY flexes his biceps.) Mama Mia! You added over an inch.

TONY: Seventeen when they're cold and eighteen when they're pumped.

JACK: (Flexes his biceps.) Mine are only fifteen and a half.

TONY: (Feels JACK's biceps.) You mean my biceps are bigger than yours?

JACK: Hey, man, you remember Sandra? That pig grooves on big biceps. Come on over to my pad tonight. We'll turn on—I got the new Stones single—"Sympathy for the Devil."

TONY: Sounds great, man. You look terrific!

JACK: You too, man. Groovy!

(They square off and begin punching each other, then wrestle on the floor. They end up in a clinch with TONY on top. Stage lights out. Houselights up on CHORUS in the audience.)

ACTOR ONE: Hegel had freed history from metaphysics—he had made it dialectic.

ACTOR TWO: But his conception of history was essentially idealistic.

ACTOR THREE: But now idealism was driven from its last refuge.

ACTOR FOUR: He that falls is remorselessly cast aside.

ACTOR ONE: It is the Darwinian struggle of the individual for existence transferred from nature to society, with intensified violence.

ACTOR TWO: The conditions of existence natural to the animal appear as the final term of human development.

SCENE FIVE

(GEORGE and MOM's apartment. The record player is stage right. A movie projector is on the coffee table with the lens facing the audience. Muscle magazines are covering the floor. As the scene opens, GEORGE is fixing the projector, rewinding a movie he has just shown. VERNON is on the floor. He has rolled three joints and is now lighting one.)

GEORGE: Be ready in a sec.

VERNON: I hope it's better than the last one, Mary.

GEORGE: I wouldn't know as I haven't seen it. I bought it under the counter on 42nd Street this afternoon.

VERNON: How much?

GEORGE: Twenty!

VERNON: Mercy me, Georgette.

GEORGE: It's in gorgeous color, Vernella Jean!

VERNON: My name is Vernon.

GEORGE: I actually adored the last movie.

VERNON: (Frowns.) I thought it was dreadful.

GEORGE: I was going to show it to Mother but she had to go to work.

VERNON: You are too, too much, Mary.

GEORGE: And you are not enough, Vernella Jean. Did you get the symbolism in the golden-shower sequence?

VERNON: Drinking piss is symbolism?

GEORGE: The way it was done—so creative.

VERNON: Ugh. Splashing all over his face.

GEORGE: He was in seventh heaven.

VERNON: Anyway, Georgette, they don't know how to act.

GEORGE: Who needs acting when they have big dicks?

VERNON: It would be divine to have Montgomery Clift.

GEORGE: She's too vanilla for me.

VERNON: How about John Derek?

GEORGE: He's a notorious fish queen.

VERNON: I heard he's bisexual.

GEORGE: Girls and women.

VERNON: Did you hear the latest about Rock Hudson? Well, he was in this pissoir in—

GEORGE: Just shut up, Vernella Jean. I want absolute silence while I watch my brand-new movie. This is going to be a spiritual experience, so keep your big, fag mouth shut! And puh-lease—? (Holds out his hand.)

VERNON: What? What?

GEORGE: The joint, Mary.

(VERNON hands the joint to GEORGE, who leans back and takes a deep drag.)

VERNON: Don't forget your martini, Georgette!

GEORGE: (Takes a sip from the martini.) You're so right. Just give me a few minutes and I'll be skipping down the Yellow Brick Road with Dorothy! (VERNON moves to table. He takes match and lights a candle.) What are you—?

VERNON: (As he lights another candle.) I'm a bougie queen!

GEORGE: What on earth is a bougie queen?

VERNON: A candle queen, Georgette.

GEORGE: I prefer cucumbers, my dear.

VERNON: As you know, I was brought up in the Catholic church. Father Penitent had these gigantic candles all over the—

GEORGE: Will you puh-lease be quiet, Vernella Jean? (Moves around the room. Shouts.) Ethyl, dear? Where are you?

VERNON: You better lay off that shit.

GEORGE: But I absolutely adore Ethyl!

VERNON: You know what Dr. Stewart said about—

GEORGE: (Has found a bottle of ethyl chloride and a rag. Moves toward VERNON.) Vernella Jean, we've been friends for a long, long time.

VERNON: I must say—you are my oldest and dearest, Georgette.

GEORGE: (Pours ethyl chloride onto the rag.) Have a sniff.

VERNON: I will not!

GEORGE: Let's go together!

VERNON: Where do you want to go?

GEORGE: To the land of Oz, where else?

VERNON: I don't think so. Miss Dr. Evangalisti told me ethyl chloride is a real killer, and you want me to go with you?

GEORGE: You haven't the faintest idea what getting high is really like until you go with dear Auntie Ethyl.

VERNON: You know I've had hepatitis, and Dr. Evangalisti told me that I could go into hepatic shock and also that I could get a frozen larynx.

GEORGE: Well, that would shut you up, Vernella Jean.

VERNON: It's a real killer, Georgette!

GEORGE: Puh-lease zip your lip so we can watch this gorgeous movie.

(VERNON holds up his hands in surrender. GEORGE goes to record player, puts on record. We hear the sound of motorcycles revving, starting and stopping, crashing into each other, etc. Now the projector is going. GEORGE turns off the lights. Both of them are staring out over the audience at a fixed point where they see the movie. GEORGE is sniffing the ethyl chloride and starting to get super-high. After VERNON takes another token from the weed, he begins to pantomime the revving motorcycles as if he were on one. He does it in a very nellie way. He starts making the sound of the revving, and gets louder and louder.)

VERNON: Whee! Whee! Whee! I'm going a hundred and—

GEORGE: Shut your cunt, Vernella Jean! (Turns on the lights and stops the record.) You're a real downer.

VERNON: I didn't mean to—

GEORGE: You just do not understand!

VERNON: What's to understand?

GEORGE: Can't you see? They're playing at being so butch and yet they're really digging each other. And pretty soon they'll be on the floor screwing each other. Watch and you'll see.

VERNON: I will.

GEORGE: Yes, Mary. You're so square you remind me of my dear old mother.

VERNON: Two stupid-looking teenagers who don't even turn me on.

GEORGE: That was not necessary. What are you trying to do to me?

VERNON: What on earth are you—?

GEORGE: You're trying to ruin my fabulous movie, you—you—I've had it with you. I—

VERNON: Okay! I'm splitting—right now!

GEORGE: Is that a promise, Mary?

VERNON: Now, you can go off—take your sweetheart, Ethyl, and go all the way—but by yourself!

GEORGE: How terribly dramatic. I'll outlive you, Miss Vernella Jean!

VERNON: Georgette, you act like you're five years old, but you look fifty!

GEORGE: I may act five and look fifty, but I don't look like a woman. Just get out of here. And the next time you come, bring your own pot!

VERNON: (As he takes a quick drag from the reefer.) Do you know what I'm going to do right now? I'm going to go out and find myself the real thing—a man of flesh and blood!

GEORGE: You are such a bum—so stupid. You don't understand anything, Mary. Go—go—go out there—pick up a trick or get down on your knees and worship some straight guy. You won't really be seeing the trick—all you will see is your dream world, and that's because you're just like me! It would be too, too painful for us to actually face the real world—(He points.) out there! Now get out of here, you stupid bitch!

VERNON: And be my guest—take another sniff of ethyl for me, Miss Malice-in-Wonderland!

GEORGE: I will, Vernella Jean. And when you kick the bucket, I'm going to write the tomb a sympathy letter!

(VERNON exits down center aisle. GEORGE mutters under his breath. He picks up a weightlifter magazine. He frowns as he turns the pages. He throws it across the stage. Finally he goes to the record player and selects a record. It is Kirsten Flagstad singing the Liebestod from Tristan und Isolde. He puts it on and lowers the lights. During the seven minutes of the record, the lights slowly dim until there is a blue-green spot on GEORGE, with the rest of the stage in darkness. He sits in chair and sips his martini. He sniffs the popper. He takes off his shirt. His hands play with his nipples. He pulls down his pants. Then he is on his knees—he reaches for the ethyl. He pours some on a rag and sniffs it.)

GEORGE: He doesn't see—he doesn't see what is really going on—he doesn't see.

(GEORGE is on the floor. He plays with himself. Then his hands move upward toward the beam of light.)

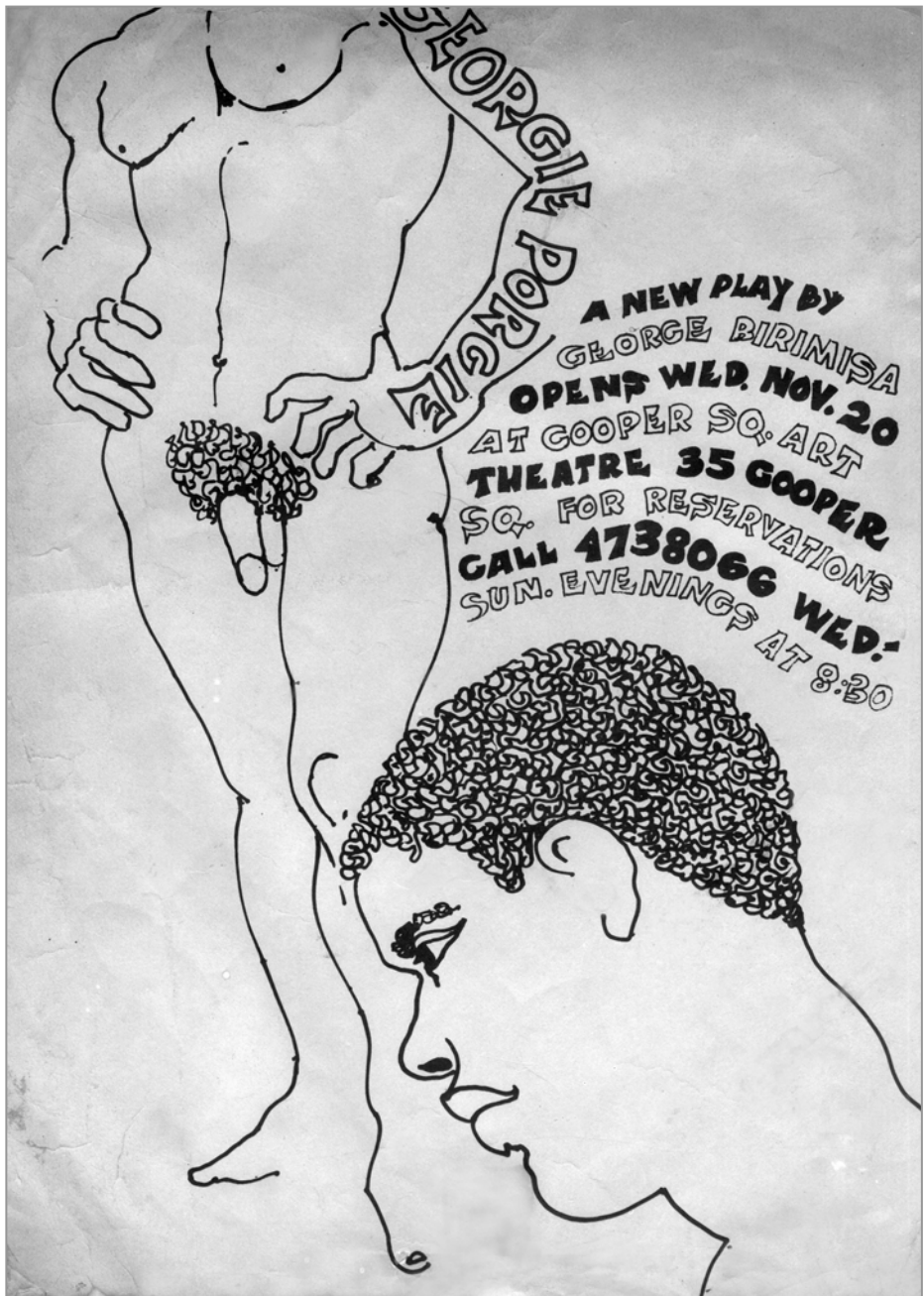
GEORGE: (Screaming.) Die! Die! Die! Die, man! Die, woman! Die, God!

(His body pulls upward, upward, upward, his hands reaching toward the heavens. As the record ends, he freezes.)

ACTOR ONE: (Walks onstage.) Man, at last the master of his own form of social organization, becomes at the same time the lord over nature, his own master, free.

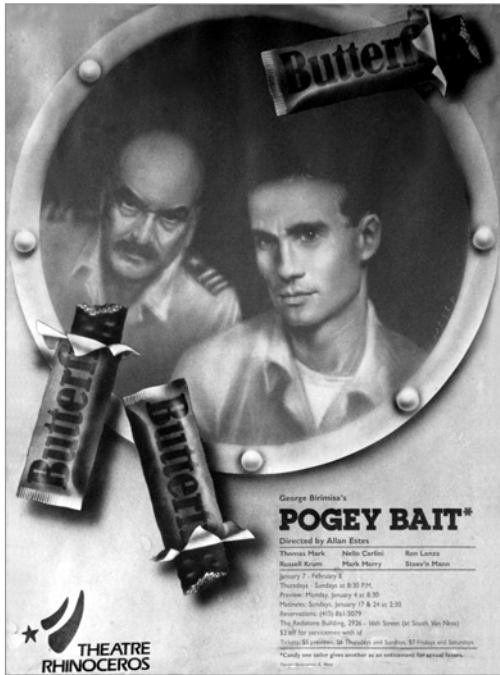
CURTAIN

[The lines spoken by the chorus include excerpts from *Anti-Duhring* by Friedrich Engels, published in 1892. "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" © 1961 Fall River Music, music by Pete Seeger, lyrics by Pete Seeger and Joe Hickerson.]



Georgie Porgie's première, November 20, 1968.

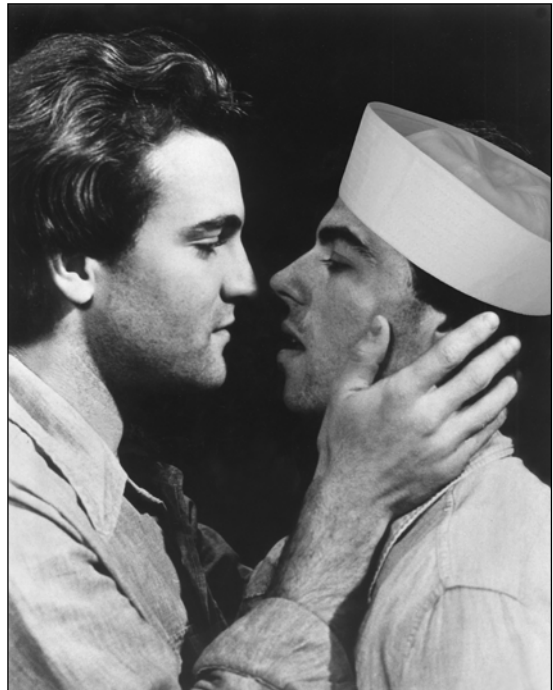
Joseph Di Giorgio's poster, displayed throughout Greenwich Village, outraged the establishment press.



San Francisco's Theatre Rhinoceros engaged Randy West to design and illustrate the poster promoting the 1982 production of *Pogey Bait*, featuring Nello Carlini and Thomas-Mark.

Larry Pelligrini as Chief Petty Officer Lefty Lefko and George Muckle as Seaman First Class Joey Jurovich in Edith O'Hara's production of *Pogey Bait* at Manhattan's 13th Street Theatre, 1978.

Reprinted from *Gay Sunshine*, Spring/Summer 1978



POGEY BAIT

(1976)

A Play in Two Acts

Pogey Bait received its world première on September 30, 1976 at One Flight Up on Western Avenue in Los Angeles (“A basic, makeshift space in an old office building,” according to Ron Pennington of *The Hollywood Reporter*, to which Joseph S. Caruso of *NewsWest* added, “Somewhat off the beaten path, its facilities limited.”). The production was directed by the author, and featured the following cast:

Captain Daily David J. Partington
Joey Jurovich Quentin Yeager
Dubois Garvey Lambert..... Anthony Sweeting
George Gium..... Steve Itkin
Lefty Lefko John Stefano
Dr. Halberstam Don Pomes

Subsequent productions were mounted at the Out-and-About Theatre in Minneapolis, Theatre Rhinoceros in San Francisco, the Las Palmas Theater in Los Angeles, and both the Thirteenth Street Theater and the Stonewall Repertory Theater in New York. *Pogey Bait* is, according to Mr. Caruso, “a play that is so literate and so gut-wrenchingly honest that it renews one’s faith in theater as a mirror of real life.”

The revised version of *Pogey Bait* published in this volume differs considerably from the previously published and produced versions, as reflected in the name changes of several characters.

CHARACTERS:

CAPTAIN BRUCEY: Captain of the U.S.S. Swanson, early 30s. He started his naval career as an Apprentice Seaman.

FRANKO “FRANKIE” BORKOVICH: Apprentice Seaman, 18. Naïve and uneducated, but a survivor and very clever. Only five feet, seven inches tall.

DUBOIS GARVEY LAMBERT: The galley cook, 25. Dubois is a Negro. There are two sides to his personality: he affects his Stepin-Fetchit side for the officers, and then there is the real Dubois. He dresses in the white uniform of a galley cook.

GEORGE GIUM: Yeoman Second Class, 25. Career sailor. Frankie’s best friend.

LEONARD “LEFTY” LEFKO: Chief Petty Officer, early 30s. Handsome and very masculine. Very popular with the crew. Supremely confident.

MATTHEW MICHAELS: Lieutenant Junior Grade, 25. A 90-day wonder, fresh out of Officer Training School. A chain smoker. Long on book learning, short on experience.

THE TIME: December 24th, 1942, and the week following.

THE SET:

Aboard the destroyer U.S.S. Swanson, at sea in the North Atlantic. Two-thirds of the stage is taken up by the Wardroom of CAPTAIN BRUCEY. A desk and a chair. On the desk, a framed photo of his wife. Another chair with an arm for writing, like in a schoolroom. A Navy emblem on the wall. An intercom with headphones and a filing cabinet. There is a short white line painted on the deck of the Wardroom. The other third of the stage is taken up by the brig. A bunk bed and a toilet.

ACT I SCENE ONE

(The Wardroom, December 24th, 0900 hours. CAPTAIN BRUCEY is exercising with a Charles Atlas stretch exerciser. On the short-wave radio we hear Vera Lynn singing “The White Cliffs of Dover.”)

“There’ll be bluebirds over
The white cliffs of Dover
Tomorrow
Just you wait and see
There’ll be joy and laughter
And peace ever after
Tomorrow
When the world is free
The shepherd will count his sheep
The valleys will bloom again
And Jimmy will go to sleep
In his own little room again
There’ll be bluebirds—”

(CAPTAIN BRUCEY puts exerciser on desk, sniffs under his arms, then twists the dial of the radio. We hear static, and then the B.B.C.)

ANNOUNCER: —concede that on this Christmas Eve it has not been a good year for the Allies. However, with the victory at Casablanca, the tide is turning. In London, Prime Minister Winston Churchill spoke these simple, memorable words: “This is not the end. It is not the beginning of the end. It is perhaps the end of the beginning.” Wishing you a merry Christmas, this is the B.B.C. in London.

(CAPTAIN BRUCEY gets a bottle of Carstairs and a shot glass from drawer. He pours a shot and drinks it. He picks up the photo of his wife.)

CAPTAIN: (Talks to photo.) Our first victory, Lorna—our first victory. (Kisses photo.) We’re on our way, honey sweetheart, and then it won’t be too long before we’re back in the good old U.S. of A., and—(There is a knock on the door. He quickly puts bottle of whiskey, shot glass, and stretch exerciser in drawer.)

Come in. (The door opens slowly. FRANKIE peers around edge of door.) Come all the way in, sailor. (FRANKIE enters. He blows on his hands and rubs them together. CAPTAIN BRUCEY smiles.) Cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey.

FRANKIE: Yes, sir!

CAPTAIN: (Big smile.) At ease. What is it, son?

FRANKIE: Gosh, sir, I—I—it's, uh—ain't nothin' much, Captain, sir. I'm lookin' fer the Officer of the Day, an'—

CAPTAIN: Attention. (Points to the line on the floor.) Toe the line.

FRANKIE: Aye, aye, sir.

CAPTAIN: Your name?

FRANKIE: Franko Borkovich, sir, but ever'body calls me Frankie, sir.

CAPTAIN: Well, Borkovick, I just got this communiqué from the radio shack—the evaluation of our action at Casablanca in October. (Bragging.) Fifteen hundred miles of land secured for the Allies in four days. How 'bout that, Borkovick?

FRANKIE: That's good, huh?

CAPTAIN: Yes! Yes! Yes! That calls for—sit down, son. (Takes bottle of Carstairs and two shot glasses from drawer and pours two shots.) A toast! Victory over the Axis powers and a merry, merry Christmas! (Smiling.) Down the hatch! (FRANKIE hesitates, but finally picks up shot glass.)

FRANKIE: Merry Christmas, sir! (They drink. FRANKIE grimaces and coughs.) Gee! Uh—kin I ask you a question, Captain?

CAPTAIN: Have one on me, lad! (Pats FRANKIE on the shoulder.)

FRANKIE: When we is firin' on the shore batteries in Fedala Bay, sir, uh—y'know, jus' north of Casablanca, sir?

CAPTAIN: I know where it is.

FRANKIE: The scuttlebutt—well—it is that we kill—that we kill only one camel, sir.

CAPTAIN: (His smile is gone.) That was a preliminary report. The final report credited us with knocking out two shore batteries.

FRANKIE: Do we kill any Frenchmen, sir?

CAPTAIN: Five dead and fifteen wounded.

FRANKIE: How come we is fightin' the French 'stead of fightin' the Nazis, sir? Ain't the French on our side, sir?

CAPTAIN: It's like this, Borkovick. (Sits on the edge of his desk.) When Hitler conquered France, he set up the puppet Vichy regime under that traitorous rat, Marshall Pétain. Since Morocco is a colony of France, it was under the rule of the Vichy regime. Therefore, the French in North Africa were taking orders from Marshall Pétain and fighting on the side of the Krauts.

FRANKIE: Oh, uh—I see, sir. (He doesn't see.)

CAPTAIN: So what is it, Borkovick?

(FRANKIE sees the photo of CAPTAIN BRUCEY's wife.)

FRANKIE: She's awfully purty, sir.

CAPTAIN: (Smiling.) She is beautiful.

FRANKIE: She looks just like you, Captain.

CAPTAIN: (Puzzled.) Just like me?

FRANKIE: I know right away—right away she's your daughter.

CAPTAIN: (Upset.) That's my wife! Attention! (FRANKIE stands at attention.) Why are you here?

FRANKIE: Huh?

CAPTAIN: Your gripe, sailor! The chow?

FRANKIE: I, uh—I like the food, sir, uh—except for the shit on a shingle for breakfast. I—

CAPTAIN: Then what is it? Why are you here?

FRANKIE: Uh—it's nothin', sir. I—I—(Shrugs his shoulders.) I knock on the wrong door. I need the sick bay. I—(Bolts for the door and exits.)

CAPTAIN: (Shouting.) Get your keister back in here—on the double. (FRANKIE re-enters.) Attention! Toe the line! Shoulders back—pull in that gut! Regular Navy or reserve, Borkovick?

FRANKIE: Reserve, sir!

CAPTAIN: Drafted?

FRANKIE: I volunteered the day after Pearl Harbor, sir.

CAPTAIN: For the duration?

FRANKIE: Yes, sir!

CAPTAIN: Rank?

FRANKIE: Apprentice Seaman, sir.

CAPTAIN: (Snaps his fingers.) The radio shack—that's where I've seen you.

FRANKIE: Uh—I'm striking for—for Radioman Third Class, sir.

CAPTAIN: (Sees the light.) Borkovick—you're the sap with the white socks.

FRANKIE: (Pulls up on his dungarees to show his blue socks.) I wear regulation socks, sir.

CAPTAIN: Stop looking at your feet. Yes, you're the sap all right.

FRANKIE: Gee, sir, I—

CAPTAIN: (Reliving it.) Norfolk—that's where—just before the invasion. I spent a week getting the Swanson ship-shape for inspection. Could eat off the deck. We were going to get a four-point-zero rating, but—but then Admiral Standish saw you—you and your white socks—you and—

FRANKIE: I got athletic feet, Captain.

CAPTAIN: Athlete's foot, you jackass.

FRANKIE: But, sir, the Hospital Corpsman—he gives me orders to wear white socks. He tells me—he says the dye in the blue socks is what is—

CAPTAIN: (Trying not to blow his stack.) You think regulation socks could hurt your feet for the one hour of inspection?

FRANKIE: I don't think of that, sir.

CAPTAIN: Think? Think? You don't know what the word means.

FRANKIE: Think! To form a mental picture in your mind. I look it up in the dictionary.

CAPTAIN: (Grimaces, then moves stage right to the door. Opens it and shouts.)
Coffee, boy. Steamin' hot!

DUBOIS: (Offstage. With a deep Southern accent.) Comin' right up, boss, suh!

CAPTAIN: (Sits at desk. Picks up fountain pen and taps it nervously on the desk.)
What is it, Borkovick?

FRANKIE: Gonna be late for my shift back in the radio shack, sir.

CAPTAIN: Stop shilly-shallying! What? What?

FRANKIE: (Twists his mouth nervously.) Well, uh—

CAPTAIN: (A stiff smile.) So, Borkovick?

FRANKIE: Huh? (Starts to cry.)

CAPTAIN: Stop that slobbering!

FRANKIE: I—I—

CAPTAIN: (Takes out his pocket watch and glances at it.) I don't have all day,
Borkovick.

FRANKIE: I, uh—uh—(Takes a deep breath.)

CAPTAIN: What, Borkovick, what?

FRANKIE: I'm, uh—uh—(Pause.)

CAPTAIN: Spit it out!

FRANKIE: Gee, I—I jus'—

CAPTAIN: Yes? Yes?

FRANKIE: I'm a ho—a homo—

CAPTAIN: Homo? Homo?

FRANKIE: (Blurts it out.) I'm a homosexual, sir!

CAPTAIN: You're a what?

FRANKIE: (Takes a deep breath.) A homosexual, sir.

CAPTAIN: (Can't believe his ears.) A homo-sexual?

FRANKIE: Aye, aye, sir!

CAPTAIN: (A long pause. Hand to chin.) Borkovick, do you even know what a homo-sexual is?

FRANKIE: (Takes hankie from back pocket, wipes his eyes and blows his nose. Then he sucks on his finger. He does this habitually at moments of stress.) Golly, sir, I look it up in lots and lots of different dictionaries—I finally find it in this great big one in the liberry. Uh—let me, uh—(Quoting from memory.) “relating to or exhibiting a desire for a member of the same sex,” sir.

CAPTAIN: You're telling me you're a queer?

FRANKIE: (Nods his head.) Aye, aye, sir.

CAPTAIN: (Throws his head back and roars with laughter.) You take the cake, son.
Let's see! Hanusek pissing in his bunk. Drivers acting like he was deaf. But

Clubino—going around with a bucket full of puke—said he was always seasick—wanted to be stationed back in the States—he got caught sticking his fingers down his throat. (Pause.) Borkovick, you don't look like a pansy to me.

FRANKIE: (Brightly.) I don', sir?

CAPTAIN: No, you don't.

FRANKIE: Gosh, sir, that's 'cause—ever since I figure out I'm a queer I, uh—(Takes a cigarette from his denim shirt and lets it hang out of the side of his mouth.) Since I start smokin', I done it like Humphrey Bogart so nobody is gonna know that I'm—y'know? I—

CAPTAIN: So you want to get out of the Navy.

FRANKIE: Uh-huh, I guess so, sir.

CAPTAIN: Did that piddlin' action at Fedala Bay scare the crap out of you?

FRANKIE: Yes, sir, sir. Scares me half to death, an'—

CAPTAIN: So—you admit you got a yellow streak a mile wide down your back?

FRANKIE: Golly, Captain. Maybe I do, but I won't be as scared if we is fightin' the Nazis instead of the French, sir. I ain't got nothin' against the French, sir.

CAPTAIN: Very, very good, Borkovick, but I'm tellin' you—it's not going to work. Stick to your cockamamie story, you will end up in shit up to your ears.

FRANKIE: Really, sir?

CAPTAIN: Five to ten years in a Navy brig, plus an Undesirable Discharge.

(There is a knock on the door. DUBOIS shuffles in with coffeepot and a cup on a tray. He is acting out the stereotype of the ignorant, Stepin-Fetchit Negro. He places the coffee cup on the desk and starts to pour the coffee while looking at CAPTAIN BRUCEY.)

CAPTAIN: By the way, Borkovick, the Navy brig is run by jarheads. You know how much they like sailors.

(DUBOIS continues to pour the coffee. It is spilling all over the desk of CAPTAIN BRUCEY.)

CAPTAIN: (Very agitated.) Holy Toledo, you clumsy nigger! All over my—

(DUBOIS grabs the dishtowel that is over his shoulder. Holds up the soggy papers on the desk. Starts to wipe up the spilled coffee.)

DUBOIS: Dey is all wet, suh.

CAPTAIN: (Imitating DUBOIS.) Yes, dey is all wet, suh! (Grabs the dishtowel from DUBOIS. Picks up the papers with his other hand.) Get your black, nigger ass out of here—on the double!

DUBOIS: Ah is, boss. Ah is—ah is—Captain, suh! This nigger is makin' hisself scarce, boss, suh. (Exits.)

CAPTAIN: Thank God he's the only nigger aboard. (Finishes wiping the desk. Looks at the papers in his hand, then throws them into the trashcan.) Okay, Borkovick, where were we?

FRANKIE: Uh—you say that I'm gonna—be in the brig run by the Gyrenes, sir?

CAPTAIN: (Has an idea.) Maybe yes—maybe no. (Points to a chair.) At ease. You can sit, Borkovick.

FRANKIE: (As he sits.) Gee, thank you, sir! You don' know how hard it is for me to fess up that I'm a pansy, sir.

CAPTAIN: How many sailors aboard this ship have been giving it to you up the old dirt road?

FRANKIE: What, sir?

CAPTAIN: How many?

FRANKIE: Gee—none, sir.

CAPTAIN: You want me to believe you're a fruitcake and you haven't—?

FRANKIE: It's like this, sir. You see, I'm ascaresd—ascaresd to death that purdy soon, or could be later, uh—that—well—I'm gonna, uh—make a pass at one of the sailors. That's why—why—(Bites his lip to stop from crying.) I—sir, I jus' can't stand it no more, sir. Sir, it's torture because—heck, we live in such close quarters—if I wanna get by another sailor, I gotta rub up against him. Can't stand it! No, sir! I know if I'm on this boat much longer, that—

CAPTAIN: (Trying to keep his temper.) Ship, Borkovick. The U.S.S. Swanson is a destroyer, and a destroyer is a ship, not a boat.

FRANKIE: Golly, if I stay aboard this, uh—ship any longer, that—gee, sir, just think—if you're on a boat—I mean—if you're on a sip—a ship, sir—a ship that is loaded with gals—just think of how hard it is gonna be to—

CAPTAIN: So—I know. I know. We've been out to sea for six weeks, and the sailors get horny as hell, and—let's face it—any port in a storm.

FRANKIE: You're tellin' me, sir? This Gunner's Mate—he's jackin' off in the shower and, uh—he winks at me, and—

CAPTAIN: (Eagerly.) He wanted you bend over and grab the soap?

FRANKIE: Gee whiz, I guess he did, but—gee, I get the hell outta there, sir.

CAPTAIN: How many sailors aboard the Swanson have made a pass at you, Borkovick?

FRANKIE: Huh?

CAPTAIN: Quit stalling. How many?

FRANKIE: Gee, sir, I—

CAPTAIN: How about Chief Petty Officer Lefty Lefko?

FRANKIE: What about Lefty, sir?

CAPTAIN: You know him by his first name?

FRANKIE: Huh? Uh—ever'body calls him "Lefty," sir.

CAPTAIN: I see.

FRANKIE: He's a real nice guy for an officer, sir.

CAPTAIN: Oh?

FRANKIE: Uh—he gives me a coupla candy bars when I first come aboard—aboard this, uh—ship, sir.

CAPTAIN: (Eagerly.) He gave you pogey bait?

FRANKIE: Butterfingers, sir.

CAPTAIN: Do you know what a pogue is, Borkovick?

FRANKIE: No, sir, I don', sir.

CAPTAIN: It's a queer sailor who takes it up the ol' kazoo.

FRANKIE: You mean up the ass, sir?

CAPTAIN: Yes, his backside!

FRANKIE: Oh, I see.

CAPTAIN: Why would a thirty-two-year-old C.P.O. give an Apprentice Seaman pogue bait unless he wanted to—(Makes a fist and pushes it forward.)

FRANKIE: Golly, I don' know, sir. Why?

CAPTAIN: Stop beating around the bush, Borkovick. How many times have you bent over for him?

FRANKIE: To be honest about it, sir, I'd, uh—I think of it, but—where—there ain't no place to go on this tin can, sir.

CAPTAIN: Did C.P.O. Lefko grab your ass?

FRANKIE: Ever'body grabs ever'body else's ass, sir.

CAPTAIN: Then he grabbed your ass?

FRANKIE: Gee, sir. All the sailors play grab-ass, sir. Uh—he gooses me a coupla times, sir.

CAPTAIN: (Triumphant.) He goosed you? He goosed you?

FRANKIE: All the sailors goose all the other sailors, sir. I'm the only one—I don' goose nobody because I'm ascarded that—

CAPTAIN: Did Lefko goose you in the shower?

FRANKIE: Ever'body gooses ever'body else in the shower, sir.

CAPTAIN: Everybody does?

FRANKIE: Yes, sir.

CAPTAIN: Naked? Naked?

FRANKIE: Ever'body's nekkid in the shower, sir.

CAPTAIN: So—Lefko goosed you in the shower?

FRANKIE: I guess, sir.

CAPTAIN: I'll get the yeoman to take your statement, Borkovick.

FRANKIE: Statement, sir?

CAPTAIN: You just informed me that Lefty Lefko made homosexual advances toward you.

FRANKIE: Gee whiz, sir, come to think of it—all he is doin' is snappin' a towel at my rear end, sir.

CAPTAIN: Are you trying to protect that bastard?

FRANKIE: Lefty is jus' horsin' aroun' like ever'body else is. Sir.

CAPTAIN: All you have to do is sign a statement, and I promise you—I'll go easy on you.

FRANKIE: Gee, sir, I don' know. I—

CAPTAIN: Believe me, Borkovick, this is not about Chief Petty Officer Leonard Lefko. It is about the morale of the sailors aboard the U.S.S. Swanson. They need to be protected from perverts like him. You'll be doing the Navy a great service by telling the truth about Lefty Lefko.

FRANKIE: I am tellin' the truth, sir.

CAPTAIN: All the enlisted men know that Lefko preys on the Apprentice Seamen who are wet behind the ears.

FRANKIE: Golly, Captain—let me tell you. Lots and lots of guys press up against me and they got a boner on. I jus'—

CAPTAIN: Keep it up, Borkovick. I see you're striking for the brig.

FRANKIE: I'm striking for Radioman Third Class, sir.

CAPTAIN: Don't you get smart with me!

FRANKIE: Come to think of it, Captain, gettin' goosed don' bother me too much, but when a sailor who's my type presses up against me with a big boner on—I wanna go all the way with him. Now where would I be if I go all the way with him?

CAPTAIN: You're telling me that all the sailors aboard my ship are fruitcakes?

FRANKIE: No, sir, but I read a lot, sir, and I read this one book about the English Navy—this book says that the English sailors screw each other when they is out to sea for a long time. And they say it don' bother the top brass becuz—

CAPTAIN: You idiot. We're red-blooded Americans—not queer Limeys.

FRANKIE: Golly, sir, I don' mean to—

CAPTAIN: Borkovick, if Lefko were in your shoes, he'd spill the beans on you and save his queer ass.

FRANKIE: Ain't got no beans to spill, sir.

CAPTAIN: You lying little prick. We'll see about that! Attention! (FRANKIE jumps up from chair.) Square your shoulders! Chin up! Suck in that gut. Your feet— (Demonstrates.) like Charlie Chaplin!

(FRANKIE looks down at his feet. Then he moves them straight forward. He looks at CAPTAIN BRUCEY.)

CAPTAIN: It will be seven days before we hit the beach. I'm going to interrogate you every day until I get the truth out of you—the truth about Lefko. You will stand at attention for the next two hours. If you pass out, we've got an ocean full of salt water. Then you're going to the brig, and you can look forward to your Christmas dinner—bread and water. (CAPTAIN BRUCEY sits behind desk. He smiles at FRANKIE.) Merry Christmas, Borkovick.

FRANKIE: Merry Christmas, Captain Brucey. (They stare at each other.)

(Instrumental music up. Blackout.)

SCENE TWO

(Lights up on the brig, December 25th, 0600 hours. FRANKIE is lying on his bunk, singing.)

FRANKIE: “Whistle while you work. Hitler is a jerk. Mussolini bit his weenie—an’ now it don’ squirt.” (Sits up and shouts.) Hey, merry Christmas!

MASTER-AT-ARMS: (Offstage.) Same to you, Mac!

FRANKIE: The name’s Borkovich.

MASTER-AT-ARMS: What did you say, Mac?

FRANKIE: Nothin’, Mac.

(FRANKIE flops down on the bunk.)

MASTER-AT-ARMS: (Offstage.) I dunno, Gium. The Officer of the Day will be down here—

GIUM: (Offstage.) No sweat. Only be here a coupla minutes. (GIUM enters.) Drop your cock and grab your socks and get out of that fart sack.

FRANKIE: (Sits up.) Hi, Gium.

GIUM: It’s the one and only pencil pusher.

FRANKIE: You here to take me to the old fart for another goin’ over?

GIUM: Shit, no. I jus’ come to see how the fuck you’re doing.

FRANKIE: Gee whiz, y’know, you is gonna end up with a Deck Court Martial fer bein’ here. (Points offstage.) What if the Master-at-Arms rats to the Captain about—?

GIUM: And what if the Officer of the Day comes down here—(Looks at his watch.) fifteen minutes too early? It’s a crap game—you take your chances.

FRANKIE: I guess you is right.

GIUM: So how’s it goin’, Frankie?

FRANKIE: It’s like this, Gium. (FRANKIE picks up the tin plate with a scrap of bread on it.) This is my Christmas turkey. Candied yams an’ cranberry sauce.

GIUM: And apple pie with ice cream.

FRANKIE: What the heck. I’ll stick to my bread and water.

GIUM: Very funny.

FRANKIE: You got a coffin nail?

GIUM: I can’t smoke at sea—makes me seasick, but—

FRANKIE: Me, too, but I don’ stop, especially—(Points to the deck.) with all those subs right down there!

(GIUM exits. We hear him ad lib with the Master-at-Arms. GIUM re-enters, hands FRANKIE a cigarette and matches. FRANKIE holds cigarette to his crotch. Pulls at the cigarette like he is masturbating.)

FRANKIE: Smokin’ a spud while I beat my pud. (Moves toward GIUM, who gives him a shove.)

GIUM: Cut out the shit! (FRANKIE lights the cigarette.) Give me the matches and flush the butt down the crapper.

FRANKIE: Okey-dokey.

GIUM: Frankie, the Captain’s out to fry your ass.

FRANKIE: He’s already got my ass down here.

GIUM: He's going to interrogate you at eighteen hundred tonight. I got to be there to write everything down. (Sits on the edge of the bunk.)

FRANKIE: He seems like a purdy okay guy when I compare him to the other officers, except for Lieutenant Michaels.

GIUM: That ninety-day wonder's always spouting big words. He doesn't know his ass from a hole in the ground.

FRANKIE: Really?

GIUM: I dunno, Frankie. Fuckin' Captain puts you in the fuckin' brig and you think he's a fuckin' nice guy?

FRANKIE: I guess you is right, but—

GIUM: You guess?

FRANKIE: Anyways, one thing I know—Lefty Lefko's a really, really nice guy.

GIUM: He's a fuckin' petty officer—one of us—not one of those highfalutin officers.

FRANKIE: (Sits on the toilet.) You can say that again.

GIUM: Frankie, the Captain's going to make you stand at attention for hours and hours, and he's gonna make you tell your story over and over.

FRANKIE: He is, really?

GIUM: He's gonna do everything to trap you.

FRANKIE: I ain't gonna change my story, Gium.

GIUM: It was a swell idea, but—shit—it isn't going to work.

FRANKIE: What are you talkin' 'bout?

GIUM: You giving the Captain that malarkey.

FRANKIE: What malarkey?

GIUM: The fuckin' scuttlebutt's all over the ship how you're tryin' to bullshit your way out of the fuckin' Navy.

FRANKIE: It ain't bullshit.

GIUM: C'mon, Frankie. You got all the guys in stitches.

FRANKIE: You mean ever'body knows about, uh—?

GIUM: Everybody is rooting to see if you can pull the wool over the Captain's eyes. They're even betting on you.

FRANKIE: What are the odds?

GIUM: Ain't nobody—but nobody—thinks it's true, Frankie.

FRANKIE: I ain't gonna marry 'cause I'm a fuckin' fairy.

GIUM: Cut the fuckin' shit. You're getting me fuckin' pissed off.

FRANKIE: You want me to swear on the Bible?

GIUM: It's me, Gium. Your best pal. You can tell me the truth.

FRANKIE: I am tellin' you the truth. I'm a fairy!

GIUM: You're telling me you're a fuckin' queer?

FRANKIE: Whatever you wanna call it, Gium.

GIUM: If that's the way you want it—can't blame you. You're smart—not trusting anybody—not even your best pal.

FRANKIE: I trust you, Gium!

GIUM: You can't be a fuckin' queer—they're nothin'—nothin' but filth—garbage—they're—(Grabs FRANKIE by the shirtfront and shakes him.) nothin' but motherfuckers!

(FRANKIE shoves GIUM and GIUM falls back on the bed. GIUM gets up—he slugs FRANKIE. FRANKIE falls to the floor. GIUM makes a jump at FRANKIE, but FRANKIE catches him with his feet and slings him across the stage. FRANKIE jumps on top of GIUM. It turns into a wrestling match—GIUM ends up on top of FRANKIE. He pins FRANKIE's shoulders to the deck. They are motionless. GIUM's face is an inch away from FRANKIE's face. They freeze and stare into each other's eyes. GIUM pushes FRANKIE away, then sits on the bunk.)

FRANKIE: It's okey-dokey, artichokey.

GIUM: (Still not looking at FRANKIE.) I bet you don't know what the fuck Captain Brucey really wants.

FRANKIE: My ass on a silver platter?

GIUM: Naw, he really wants the fuckin' goods on Lefty Lefko.

FRANKIE: (Suddenly very alert.) The goods? What's he got against Lefty?

GIUM: Every time Lefko's name comes up, he has a conniption fit. Lefty? He gets a kick out of pissing him off. But Lefty—he's always fuckin' around with that titless Wave who—

FRANKIE: You mean that blond Hospital Corpsman?

GIUM: His name is on the tip of my—

FRANKIE: Zeke Landis.

GIUM: Everyone knows he's a pogue.

FRANKIE: Gee! I don't know.

GIUM: The scuttlebutt is that Lefty was givin' him the ol' salami behind the torpedo tubes.

FRANKIE: (Very jealous.) You think Lefty's a pogue?

GIUM: Shit no. Lefty just likes to get his fuckin' ashes hauled when there aren't any dames around. Gotta scam. (Moves toward exit. Pauses. Reaches into his pocket and pulls out a Baby Ruth candy bar. Throws it at FRANKIE.) You're a real character, Frankie. (Exits.)

FRANKIE: Yeah, I'm a real pogue. (Drops his dungarees and sits on the toilet. Pause.) "Here I sit broken-hearted. Tried to shit an' only farted." (Tears off the wrapper of the candy bar and takes a big bite out of it. Blackout.)

SCENE THREE

(Lights up on the Wardroom, December 25th, 1600 hours. CAPTAIN BRUCEY is at his desk. GIUM enters in a very businesslike way. He puts a folder on CAPTAIN BRUCEY's desk.)

GIUM: They were decoded by Lieutenant Tatum, sir.

CAPTAIN: Direct communication?

GIUM: For our information, sir. (Starts to exit.)

CAPTAIN: I need you for the interrogation of Borkovick, Yeoman. I've scheduled it for eighteen hundred hours.

GIUM: Eighteen hundred, Captain, I—

CAPTAIN: Do you have a hot date?

GIUM: It's the Tyrone Power movie, sir. (Puts his hands to his chest.) Maureen O'Hara's big bazooms, sir.

CAPTAIN: The interrogation will be short and sweet. Send him in.

GIUM: Aye, aye, sir. (Exits. LEFTY enters followed by GIUM, who sits and transcribes what they say. LEFTY salutes and stands at attention.)

CAPTAIN: (Not looking up.) Turbo Generator and Evaporator?

LEFTY: Ship-shape, sir.

CAPTAIN: The Twenty-millimeters?

LEFTY: Ice removed—ready for action, Captain.

CAPTAIN: At ease. Have a seat, Lefko. (LEFTY doesn't sit down. Stares at CAPTAIN BRUCEY.) You look as fit as a fiddle.

LEFTY: I keep in shape, sir.

CAPTAIN: (Insinuating.) You do, don't you? (Turns to GIUM.) Yeoman, you got a butt for my Chief Petty Officer?

LEFTY: I still don't smoke, Captain.

CAPTAIN: (Leans back in his chair.) How long, Lefko?

LEFTY: How long what, sir?

CAPTAIN: Dago.

LEFTY: Summer of 'thirty-eight, sir.

CAPTAIN: Back then I thought the war would never start.

LEFTY: I know, Captain.

CAPTAIN: We're going to remember this war as the greatest experience of our lives.

LEFTY: We are, sir?

CAPTAIN: Stalin stopped the Germans at Stalingrad, but he won't stop us!

LEFTY: Excuse me, sir. Aren't we fighting the Nazis?

CAPTAIN: As soon as we defeat Hitler, we'll get the godless Bolsheviks! (Picks up a folder.) Franko Borkovich. You know him, Lefty?

LEFTY: Let's see. (Thinking.) Apprentice Seaman striking for Radioman Third Class, sir.

CAPTAIN: So you know him?

LEFTY: See him in the radio shack all the time, sir.

CAPTAIN: He's in the brig.

LEFTY: He is, sir?

CAPTAIN: Don't you want to know why?

LEFTY: Okay—why, sir?

CAPTAIN: Borkovich tells me he's a pogue.

LEFTY: A what, sir?

CAPTAIN: A cocksucker.

LEFTY: He said that, sir?

CAPTAIN: I know all about the Butterfingers, Lefko.

LEFTY: Butterfingers, sir?

CAPTAIN: PogeY bait.

LEFTY: Okay! Okay! So I gave the kid a few candy bars.

CAPTAIN: Always grabbing his ass!

LEFTY: I guess I've goosed him at one time or another, Captain.

CAPTAIN: So you admit you've grabbed his ass?

LEFTY: Before you went to Officer's Training School—where was it? Ah—Pensacola!
Yeah. I used to goose the hell out of you.

CAPTAIN: I don't know what you're—

LEFTY: (Grabs his crotch.) More than that, sir. More than that!

CAPTAIN: Why you—! (He is flustered. Gives a quick, guilty glance at GUIM. Moves behind his desk and holds up some papers.) He spilled the beans on you, Lefty.

LEFTY: Spilled the beans, sir?

CAPTAIN: Yes. Spilled the beans.

LEFTY: No beans to spill, sir.

CAPTAIN: You're sweating.

LEFTY: I'm going to miss the Tyrone Power movie.

CAPTAIN: He says you screwed him up the old kazoo.

LEFTY: If—and that's a great big "if"—(Pause.) if he says that—he's lying, sir.

CAPTAIN: I've got you by the short hairs, Lefty. (CAPTAIN BRUCEY waves a sheet of paper in the air.) Borkovick's sworn statement that you gave it to him up the—
(Starts to put the papers on the desk but they fall to the deck.)

LEFTY: (Quickly picks up the papers, glances at them, then puts them on the desk.)
Nothing but code from the radio shack.

CAPTAIN: Not here right now, Lefty. But—hear me loud and clear—I'm going to nail your queer ass.

(LEFTY takes the photo of CAPTAIN BRUCEY's wife from desk.)

LEFTY: Big knockers, Captain. Makes Betty Grable look flat-chested. (Puckers up his lips and gives the photo an air kiss.)

CAPTAIN: I'm going to throw the book at you. I'll get you if it's the last thing I do on this earth, you double-gated prick!

LEFTY: (As he salutes and grins.) Aye, aye, sir! (Exits.)

(CAPTAIN BRUCEY circles the desk. Takes bottle of Carstairs from drawer—takes a slug—then another one. Puts bottle back in drawer. Wipes off the photo of his wife. Blackout.)

SCENE FOUR

(Lights up on the brig, December 26th, 1400 hours. FRANKIE is lying on his bunk.)

LEFTY: (Enters backwards as he talks to the guard on duty.) I'll take you off the graveyard watch, Buckley! (Turns around—very loud voice.) So—how's it goin', Mac?

FRANKIE: (Sits up. Angry.) That's a dumb question, Mac! Would you like to join me for some bread and water, Mac?

LEFTY: (Gestures offstage. Lowers his voice.) Buckley's out there, Frankie! (Loud voice.) Hey, did you hear the joke about the five cannibals who worked as Navy translators?

FRANKIE: (Sullen.) Uh—I guess not.

LEFTY: Okay. Five cannibals are employed by the Navy as translators. When the Commanding Admiral of the armada that is going to invade North Africa welcomes the cannibals, he says, "You're gobs now. You can eat any of the rations that the sailors are eating. So don't eat any of the sailors. Is that a deal?" The cannibals promise. Four weeks later, the Admiral says to the cannibals, "One of our Chief Petty Officers has disappeared. Do you know what happened to him?" The cannibals all shake their heads. After the Admiral leaves, the leader of the cannibals turns to the others and says, "Which one of you idiots ate the Chief Petty Officer?" A hand raises, and the leader of the cannibals replies, "You idiot! For four weeks we've been eating Ensigns, Lieutenants, Lieutenant Commanders, Commanders, and even one Captain, and no one notices a thing. And then you had to go and eat a Chief Petty Officer!"

FRANKIE: (Doesn't smile.) I wish one of the cannibals would eat Captain Brucey.

LEFTY: You pissed at me?

FRANKIE: Why in hell you callin' me "Mac"?

LEFTY: (Points toward the guard.) For his ears, Frankie. How's it goin'?

FRANKIE: If Captain Brucey finds out you're here, you're gonna be up shit creek without a paddle.

LEFTY: Fuck him. All he can do is break me down to Petty Officer First Class, and that's been done lots of times before.

FRANKIE: He kin throw the book at you, Lefty—give you a General Court Martial.

LEFTY: The scuttlebutt is that Gium was down here, Frankie.

FRANKIE: Yesterday.

LEFTY: He and Brucey—(Crosses his fingers.) thick as thieves.

FRANKIE: Gium's okay in my book. He comes down here to warn me that—that Captain Brucey is gonna interrogate me over and over and over until—(Lowers his voice.) until I spill the beans on you.

LEFTY: So what did you tell the pencil-pusher?

FRANKIE: (Sarcastic.) I tol' him—I said you corn-holed every sailor aboard this ship.

LEFTY: I know that titless Wave was down here to pump you, Frankie.

FRANKIE: Cut out the shit. Gium's my buddy.

LEFTY: You need a buddy like him like you need a hole in the head.

FRANKIE: Holy Moses! You don' trus' nobody.

LEFTY: Not that sea-pussy of a yeoman. (Pause.) He's a brown-nose from way back.

FRANKIE: Gee, Lefty, I—

LEFTY: So—what did he say about me?

FRANKIE: All he says is that Captain Brucey's after your ass, not mi-un.

LEFTY: Don't you believe it. He's after your ass, too.

FRANKIE: Gee, uh—you think so?

LEFTY: So what did you tell Brucey about me, Frankie?

FRANKIE: Gee, uh—only—I tell him that you give me pogeey bait, an', uh—that you goose me ever' once in a while. Heck, you kid aroun' like all the other gobs do, an'—an' ever'body geoses ever'body else all the time.

LEFTY: That's all you told him?

FRANKIE: (Bitter.) You want me to cross my heart and hope to die?

LEFTY: Kid—I trust you. You're four-oh in my book.

(LEFTY pulls FRANKIE to him. FRANKIE jerks away, crosses to the toilet, and sits with his face in his hands.)

FRANKIE: Landis, uh—can't think of his first name.

LEFTY: What the fuck are you—?

FRANKIE: Landis, the Hospital Corpsman. The guy with the buckteeth. (Pulls up his upper lip, sticks out his teeth.)

LEFTY: Oh, you mean Zeke Landis? He doesn't have buckteeth.

FRANKIE: He's got big pimples all over his face and one of 'em is a boil—shit—here I am goin' through all this shit for you—in a coupla months you won't even remember my name.

LEFTY: How come you got this bug up your ass?

FRANKIE: That Zeke Landis. It's—it's you and him. Gium tol' me that you is screwin' him.

LEFTY: Oh, that! (In a whisper.) That was last year—long before you came aboard ship.

FRANKIE: You mean that—?

LEFTY: Frankie, it was long before you came aboard ship.

FRANKIE: Uh—you sure you're not still fuckin' aroun' with him?

LEFTY: (Crosses his heart.) Cross my heart and hope to die.

FRANKIE: You screwin' aroun' with any of the other sailors?

LEFTY: I used to poke some of the deck hands, but not since I met you.

FRANKIE: Really?

LEFTY: You're the only one.

(LEFTY crosses to FRANKIE. Pulls him up from the toilet seat. Holds him at arm's length.)

LEFTY: I'm nuts about you, Frankie.

FRANKIE: (His face lights up.) Nuts about me?

LEFTY: You knock me out, kid.

FRANKIE: Really?

LEFTY: Y'know, Frankie, that Brucey asshole—he's gonna work on you every fuckin' day to get you to spill the beans on me.

FRANKIE: I ain't gonna spill the beans on you, Lefty.

LEFTY: Kid, you really want to get the fuck out of the Navy, huh?

FRANKIE: I join to fight the Nazis or the Japs—not the French. Ain't got nothin' against the French. (Shakes his head in confusion. Snaps his fingers.) Jus' like that, I'm fightin' the French. Here I am—on the bridge watchin' all these tracer shells—all different colors—zoomin' over my head—landin' so close, the water splashes on me. Then the destroyer to the starboard is hit on the fantail, an'—then—then—the French is tryin' to kill me. Holy cow!

LEFTY: Take it easy, kid!

FRANKIE: I hear this explosion like a clap of thunder. I figger we're hit and I'm gonna die. But guess what? It's only one of our own five-inch guns goin' off jus' a few feet from where I'm at on the bridge. You know what I do? I fuckin' shit in my pants, Lefty. When Captain Brucey gets near me, I move 'way. I—(On the verge of tears.) I wanna jump overboard. And heck, we ain't even fightin' the goddam Nazis, for cryin' out loud. Shit—here I am eighteen years old and I can be dead, forever dead and buried. For what? For what? For fightin' the fuckin' French? (Pause. Sniffs.) You think I'm a coward, Lefty?

LEFTY: Hell, no. You jus' gotta keep a tight asshole when you go into battle, Frankie.

FRANKIE: But I was scared to death.

LEFTY: Every man shits bullets when he goes into battle.

FRANKIE: They do? Really?

LEFTY: Yer darn tootin' they do—I fuckin' do.

FRANKIE: Gee, I never know, y'know?

LEFTY: Frankie, how would you like it if that fart-faced Fuhrer was the dictator of the good ol' U.S. of A.?

FRANKIE: If I'm dead and buried, it won't make no difference one way or 'nother. (LEFTY reaches into his sock and pulls out a pack of Chesterfields. He throws it at FRANKIE.) You remember my brand.

(LEFTY moves to FRANKIE. Gives FRANKIE a quick kiss. Pulls away, looks at his watch.)

LEFTY: Gotta scam outta here.

FRANKIE: (As he gropes LEFTY.) Please—please don't go.

LEFTY: Jesus, kid, I—

(LEFTY feels FRANKIE's ass. Then he unbuckles FRANKIE's dungarees and pulls them down. FRANKIE bends over. LEFTY zips down his fly and pulls down FRANKIE's skivvies.)

BUCKLEY: (Offstage.) Lefty, I go off at oh-eight hundred.

LEFTY: Okay! I'm outta here! (LEFTY quickly zips up his fly. Pats FRANKIE's ass. FRANKIE pulls up his dungarees. LEFTY moves toward the exit.) Keep those

cigarettes under the mattress and flush the butts down the toilet. You hear me, Mac?

FRANKIE: (Sitting on the edge of the bunk. Dejected.) I hear you, Mac!

(LEFTY starts to exit, but changes his mind. Crosses to FRANKIE, takes FRANKIE into his arms. Gives him a gentle kiss on the mouth.)

LEFTY: (Very tenderly.) Don't take any wooden nickels, Mac.

FRANKIE: (Just as tenderly.) Don't worry, Mac. Ain't about to.

(LEFTY exits. Blackout.)

SCENE FIVE

(Lights up on the Wardroom, December 28th, 1400 hours. GIUM is sitting behind CAPTAIN BRUCEY's desk, writing notes. FRANKIE is downstage, standing at attention. He starts to stagger. GIUM grabs him and sits him down.)

GIUM: Frankie, I can get my ass in a sling for tellin' you, but, uh—Captain Brucey knows about Lefty comin' to see you in the brig. The old fart questioned Buckley—he spilled the beans on you and Lefty. He—

FRANKIE: You mean he sees Lefty an' me, uh—messin' aroun'?

GIUM: Messing around?

FRANKIE: Yeah, y'know?

GIUM: Jesus! You really are like that.

FRANKIE: Queer? How many times you want me to tell you, Gium?

GIUM: (Resigned.) Okay! Okay!

FRANKIE: Gee, you ain't gonna squeal on me? Tell Captain—

GIUM: I won't squeal on you, but—

CAPTAIN: (Offstage.) Shave and shine those shoes, sailor. (FRANKIE quickly moves back to the line and stands at attention. He is wobbly. CAPTAIN BRUCEY enters. Sets mug of coffee on desk. Smiles.) That nigger can't even make a good cup of joe. Bilge water! (Turns to GIUM.) You have everything from this morning's interrogation?

GIUM: Yes, sir.

CAPTAIN: Is it all typed up?

GIUM: Everything except from this morning, Captain. (Hands CAPTAIN BRUCEY a stack of papers.)

CAPTAIN: (Leafs through the papers.) Well done, sailor. I keep forgetting your name.

GIUM: Yeoman Second Class George Gium, sir.

CAPTAIN: Keep up the good work and you'll be Yeoman First Class before you know it.

GIUM: Thank you, Captain.

(CAPTAIN BRUCEY walks back and forth in front of FRANKIE.)

CAPTAIN: Name!

FRANKIE: Borkovich, Franko, sir.

CAPTAIN: Rank!

FRANKIE: Six-six-two-five-three—

CAPTAIN: Rank!

FRANKIE: Uh—

CAPTAIN: Rank, sailor!

FRANKIE: Uh—Apprentice Seaman, sir.

CAPTAIN: Serial number!

FRANKIE: Six-six-two, uh—I keep forgettin' it, sir.

CAPTAIN: When—when did that asshole go down to the brig to see you?

FRANKIE: What asshole, sir?

CAPTAIN: Lefty Lefko, who else?

FRANKIE: Uh—I think it was the day after Christmas, sir.

CAPTAIN: You think? Think?

FRANKIE: It was the day after Christmas, sir.

CAPTAIN: He came to see you in the brig the day after Christmas?

FRANKIE: I just said so, Captain.

CAPTAIN: Don't get smart with me. (Turns to GIUM.) You got that down, Yeoman?

GIUM: Yes, Captain Brucey.

CAPTAIN: Tell me, Borkovick, why did Lefko go down to the brig to see you?

FRANKIE: Why?

CAPTAIN: Was he worried that you were going to squeal on him?

FRANKIE: Squeal about what, sir?

CAPTAIN: That you would tell me that Lefty was sodomizing you.

FRANKIE: Sodom what, sir?

CAPTAIN: Giving it to you up the ol' keister.

FRANKIE: Oh! Nothin' like that happened, sir.

CAPTAIN: Don't lie to me, Borkovick!

FRANKIE: Gee! Lefty feels sorry for me bein' in the brig. Sir.

CAPTAIN: From the beginning—everything that happened when Leonard Lefko visited you in the brig.

(FRANKIE staggers.)

FRANKIE: When, uh—he comes down there, uh—the brig, sir—he worries—he figgers I'm lyin' 'bout him to save my own ass.

CAPTAIN: You lying little prick. I'm going to interrogate you until I get the truth out of you. You hear me loud and clear?

FRANKIE: How could I not hear you, sir?

CAPTAIN: Do you realize you're headed for a naval prison where you'll be breaking rocks for the next twenty years?

FRANKIE: I am, sir?

CAPTAIN: Tell me the truth about Lefko and I'll drop all the charges against you. I give you my word as an officer and a gentleman.

FRANKIE: Gee, sir, I'm tellin' you the truth, sir.

(CAPTAIN BRUCEY moves behind his desk. FRANKIE is so exhausted that his legs wobble.)

CAPTAIN: (Turns to GIUM.) I can't have a Chief Petty Officer running around, screwing all the sailors.

GIUM: No, sir, you can't!

CAPTAIN: It undermines discipline.

GIUM: Yes, sir, Captain!

CAPTAIN: Lefty Lefko is a cancer on my ship. I don't think Borkovick was a pogue before that double-gated bastard got his hands on him. (Pause.) We must be morally strong, Yeoman. No one understands that the war against fascism is just the beginning. After the Nazis and the Japs, we've got the Commies!

GIUM: I never thought of that, sir.

(CAPTAIN BRUCEY circles FRANKIE.)

CAPTAIN: For your information, Borkovick, C.P.O. Leonard Lefko is confined to his quarters.

FRANKIE: Really, sir?

CAPTAIN: A Deck Court Martial will be brought against him as soon as we pull into the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

FRANKIE: Oh, that's the one that ain't so bad, uh—sir?

CAPTAIN: There is no way you can save Lefty's queer ass. I'm going to drum Lefty out of the Navy with a Dishonorable Discharge. (Pause.) Chin up! Square those shoulders—suck in that gut. Let's start from the beginning. From when that switch-hitter Lefty came to see you in the brig. As for you—

(FRANKIE's knees buckle. He sprawls on the deck.)

CAPTAIN: Yeoman, take the fruit back to the brig. On the double!

GIUM: Aye, aye, sir!

(Blackout.)

ACT II

SCENE ONE

(The brig, December 29th, 0300 hours. The light is dim, but becomes brighter as the scene progresses. FRANKIE is asleep on the bunk.)

DUBOIS: (Offstage, singing with perfect enunciation.) "It's a quarter to three. There's no one in the place except you and me." (FRANKIE turns over, mutters.) "So set 'em up, Joe. I've got a little story you oughta know. We're drinkin', my friend, to the end of a brief episode." (Enters, holding a bottle of whiskey. Dances into the brig.) "One more for my baby, and one more for the road." (Speaking.) Wake up, Mister Charlie.

FRANKIE: Vio—Violet?

DUBOIS: (Doing his Stepin-Fetchit routine.) Ain't no kind of violet. Ah is the coon from the galley, boss, sir.

FRANKIE: (Sits up.) Aw—what the heck is—?

DUBOIS: (Reciting.) You may not know it, but I'm quite a poet.

FRANKIE: What the fuck?

DUBOIS: (Singing.) "I've got a lot of things to say, and when I'm lonely, you simply gotta listen to me."

FRANKIE: (As he rubs his eyes.) Huh? Did you make that up?

DUBOIS: Lady Day—Cab Calloway.

FRANKIE: Huh?

DUBOIS: Just forget it.

FRANKIE: Uh—my name is Frankie.

DUBOIS: Solid, Jack.

FRANKIE: The way you're talkin'—?

DUBOIS: (Back to his Stepin-Fetchit routine.) Ah can't help it, Massah Boss—ah is a nigger! (Back to his real self.) Here's a toast to the Man! (Takes a slug from the bottle.)

FRANKIE: Who?

DUBOIS: Captain Goosey.

FRANKIE: You mean Captain Brucey?

DUBOIS: Goosey! That's what ever'body calls that jive turkey. He's a boil on the ass of society. (Holds out the bottle.)

FRANKIE: (Laughing.) I'll drink to Captain Goosey! (Drinks.) How come you talk two different ways?

DUBOIS: I've got a forked tongue—the tongue of a serpent.

FRANKIE: Uh—comin' down here—ain't you worried that—?

DUBOIS: Captain Goosey is tucked in his bunk, having dreams of torturing you tomorrow, and—

FRANKIE: What 'bout the guard out there?

DUBOIS: I'll wake him up when I take a powder.

FRANKIE: Golly, I don' even know your name.

DUBOIS: Dubois.

FRANKIE: Do what?

DUBOIS: Bois—the opposite of girls.

FRANKIE: That your last name?

DUBOIS: Dubois Garvey Lambert. (FRANKIE looks puzzled.) Too fancy for a nigger?

FRANKIE: Uh—I didn't say that.

DUBOIS: But you were lookin' it, Jack.

FRANKIE: My name ain't Jack.

DUBOIS: Franko Borkovich, Apprentice Seaman, and everybody calls you Frankie. (Holds up the bottle and sings.) "I could tell you a lot, but you gotta be true to

your code. One for my baby, and one more for the road.” (Drinks, then hands the bottle to FRANKIE.)

FRANKIE: (As he drinks.) How do I know you ain’t jus’ another of Captain Goosey’s tricks?

DUBOIS: I’m Captain Goosey in blackface! (Holds out hands à la Al Jolson and sings.) “Swanee—how I love ya, how I love ya! My dear old Swanee! I’d give the world to be among the folks in D-I-X-I-E—” (Holds his nose.)

FRANKIE: (Laughs.) Yer a real character.

DUBOIS: (Back to his Stepin-Fetchit routine.) Dis dum nigger—he don’ do nothin’ the Navy way—like he done spilt the hot java all over the Man.

FRANKIE: You spilled it on purpose?

DUBOIS: (His real self.) Now why would I do such a thing to sweet Captain Goosey? (Back to Stepin Fetchit.) Ah didn’t do it, suh! Don’ lynch me—I don’ wanna be strange fruit.

FRANKIE: Uh—you don’, uh—you got a cigarette on you?

DUBOIS: (Hands FRANKIE a pack of Luckies.) Keep ’em, Pops.

FRANKIE: My brand!

DUBOIS: It’s not your brand. You smoke Chesterfields.

FRANKIE: Golly, I—

DUBOIS: You don’t have to try to butter me up.

FRANKIE: (Takes a cigarette and lights it.) Here! (Holds out the pack of cigarettes.) You better take ’em with you. Captain Goosey has this stinkin’ brig searched every four hours.

(DUBOIS takes the pack of cigarettes from FRANKIE, takes Scotch tape from his pocket, carefully tapes the pack of cigarettes to the underside of the toilet.)

DUBOIS: Guaranteed, Captain Goosey won’t go near the real shit.

FRANKIE: Golly, Dubois, you—

DUBOIS: When I first came aboard this ol’ tin can, ol’ Goosey said to me, “Boy, if you want to stay on the good side of me, you make my java the way I want it made.” Then he gave me instructions—on the exact amount of coffee to put in his special coffeepot. But I got a problem, Frankie. This subhuman coon can’t count the spoonfuls.

FRANKIE: How come, uh—why is you doin’ all this for me?

DUBOIS: I’ve been listening to Captain Goosey torturing you!

FRANKIE: You listen?

DUBOIS: The galley’s next to the Wardroom. I’ve had my ear to the bulkhead from when you first told him you were a fairy. I didn’t give a shit at first—but I gotta say—you’re a real cool cat.

FRANKIE: That’s good, huh?

DUBOIS: Tonight I gave him a sleeping powder, and for once I didn’t spill the water.

FRANKIE: You’re the smartest guy I’ve ever met, an’ I ain’t butterin’ you up.

DUBOIS: (Sudden anger.) Even though I'm a nigger?

FRANKIE: Heck—heck no.

DUBOIS: Hot damn—(Looks at his watch.) it's a quarter to three! (Starts to sing again. Holds his hands out, indicating he wants FRANKIE to join him.) "It's a quarter to three—" (Speaking.) C'mon, Frankie.

(FRANKIE joins him in singing, a half beat behind DUBOIS, but then he gets into it.)

DUBOIS, FRANKIE: (Singing.) "There's no one in the place except you and me. So set 'em up, Joe. I've got a little story you oughta know. We're drinkin', my friend, to the end of a brief episode. So one more for my baby, and one more for the road."

DUBOIS: (Sings the next line from the song.) "I gotta little story you oughta know." (Speaking.) At oh-seven hundred, old Goosey is sickin' Lieutenant Junior Grade Michaels on you.

FRANKIE: Oh?

DUBOIS: He studied psychology at Harvard.

FRANKIE: What's that?

DUBOIS: A so-called science that tries to deal with mental processes and behavior.

FRANKIE: Oh, yeah. When I join up, this guy asks me all these questions—asks me if I ever fuck aroun' with a guy.

DUBOIS: Watch out for Lieutenant Michaels. Somethin' loony 'bout him. He wants some kind of a perfect society, but I don't think his perfect society has anything to do with real people.

FRANKIE: Really?

DUBOIS: Old Goosey puts it on the line—you know where he stands—but Lieutenant Michaels—thinks he knows it all.

FRANKIE: Golly, I—

DUBOIS: Frankie, one other thing. Watch out for George Gium.

FRANKIE: Watch out for him?

DUBOIS: If you look closely at his nose, you'll see it's a dark brown from shoving it up Goosey's asshole.

FRANKIE: Lefty says the same thing.

DUBOIS: Gium's striking for Officer's Training. He wants to be a ninety-day wonder—and he'll do anything to get it.

FRANKIE: But—you mean I shouldn't trust nobody?

DUBOIS: I trust my mama—period. Only she ain't aboard. (Ashes fall from FRANKIE's cigarette.) In the toilet bowl!

(FRANKIE cleans up the ashes. Puts them in the toilet bowl. Sits on the toilet.)

FRANKIE: Y'know—I'm a junior in high school when the Japs bomb Pearl Harbor. I join up the nex' day. You're so smart—I bet you finish high school, huh?

DUBOIS: My mama graduated from Morgan State College, and she taught me at home. All these books around the house, but not the white man's books. W.E.B.

Dubois—he's my favorite writer. He's famous all over the world, except in the good old U.S. of A.

FRANKIE: Dubois? Is that—?

DUBOIS: My mama named me after him. His book *The Souls of Black Folks* opened my eyes to what in hell is really going on back in the States with my black brothers and sisters. At Harvard and Yale they taught malarkey, like Booker T. Washington wasn't kissing Mister Charlie's keister. That handkerchief-head preached that the Negro should stay in his place and make something of himself by hard work and study.

FRANKIE: So what's wrong with that?

DUBOIS: What's wrong with it? How come I'm washin' dishes for Mister Charlie? Do you see any Negroes anywhere else on this old tub?

FRANKIE: Gee—guess, uh—never think about that, y'know?

DUBOIS: No white cat does.

FRANKIE: Did you quit college to join the Navy?

DUBOIS: I was drafted.

FRANKIE: Gee! I'm a volunteer.

DUBOIS: I quit college because I couldn't stand the bullshit. What student isn't taught that the fuckin' Revolutionary War was the rich Mister Charlies from the Colonies fighting the rich Mister Charlies from England? They were fightin' over who was going to rob the poor people—just like now—just like this fuckin' war—same old shit.

FRANKIE: All this stuff you're talkin' about—it's all news to me.

DUBOIS: Remember when you tol' Goosey you couldn't understand why we were fightin' the French?

FRANKIE: If I'm gonna fight anybody, I'm gonna fight the fuckin' Nazis.

DUBOIS: How do you think I feel? Here I am fighting on the side of the white man against other white men, and what for? North Africa—the place where my ancestors came from! Now, isn't that nuts?

FRANKIE: You can say that again. (Pause.) Uh—does it make any difference to you that I'm, uh—

DUBOIS: Frankie, I used to shack up with a drag queen—very light-skinned—called himself Loretta Young. Bleached out his face—straightened his hair—wanted to be a white lady. Finally ditched me for some blond guy.

FRANKIE: You mean you're a queer—jus' like me?

DUBOIS: (Evasive.) I get my kicks all kinds of ways. (Looks at his watch.) I better get my nigger ass out of here.

FRANKIE: Gee! You're a real pal, y'know?

DUBOIS: Keep on truckin', Frankie. (Exits.)

(Blackout.)

SCENE TWO

(Lights up on the Wardroom, December 30th, 0900 hours. FRANKIE is standing at attention. MICHAELS is standing behind CAPTAIN BRUCEY's desk, smoking. GIUM is standing next to him, holding a huge stack of papers.)

GIUM: I have all the interrogations typed up except for the last few hours, sir. (Puts them on the desk.)

MICHAELS: (Sits.) It looks like Gone with the Wind.

GIUM: I think it's bigger, sir. (Sits, with pad and clipboard ready.)

MICHAELS: That will be all, Gium.

GIUM: (Not moving.) Sir, I have orders from Captain Brucey to take down everything that Borkovich says. I—

MICHAELS: I'll take the responsibility. Attention! (GIUM stands at attention.) Dismissed! (GIUM exits. MICHAELS locks the door.) At ease, Borkovich. Have a seat. (FRANKIE sits. MICHAELS takes cigarettes from his pocket and offers one to FRANKIE, then pushes ashtray across the desk.) We must not get ashes on the Captain's floor.

FRANKIE: Deck, sir! (FRANKIE takes cigarette and lights it.)

MICHAELS: I beg your pardon?

FRANKIE: If Captain Brucey hears you call the deck "the floor," he's gonna have a fit—call you a ninety-day wonder.

MICHAELS: Hmmm. It seems Captain Brucey has been having a lot of fits lately. (Takes off his glasses, cleans them. Takes cigarette that has been hanging from his mouth and nervously lights another one with it.) Is it true that all the deck hands call him "Captain Goosey"? (FRANKIE doesn't answer.) Do you mind if I call you "Franko"?

FRANKIE: Call me "Frankie," sir.

MICHAELS: Well, Frankie, I want you to know how I feel about this, um—unfortunate dilemma. I feel Captain Brucey's interrogation of you is a kind of torture. I spoke my mind to him.

FRANKIE: You did, sir?

MICHAELS: Yes, I did, Frankie, I—

FRANKIE: Your eyes, sir.

MICHAELS: I beg your pardon?

FRANKIE: When you turn your head—your eyes—like, uh—green, but then you move your head, an'—blue like the ocean. You—

MICHAELS: (Blushes.) Uh—Frankie, I—

FRANKIE: Betcha the gals go for you in a big way—betcha!

MICHAELS: (Clears his throat.) Well, let us talk—talk about your, uh—homosexuality.

FRANKIE: What about it, sir?

MICHAELS: You see, Frankie, all of my information about this inversion comes from psychology textbooks when I was at Harvard. You're the first homosexual I've been in direct contact with. I have no actual experience with this disease.

FRANKIE: (Coming on to MICHAELS.) You're really good-lookin', sir.

MICHAELS: (Takes off his glasses and diligently wipes them.) Please, please, I am not a homosexual.

FRANKIE: I know you're not, Doc.

MICHAELS: Then—then why are you—?

FRANKIE: I only sack out with real men, sir.

MICHAELS: Real men?

FRANKIE: Guys who ain't a queer—guys like you, sir.

MICHAELS: Please—keep me out of this. How can I be objective about this unfortunate situation if—?

FRANKIE: Doncha want the truth, for cryin' out loud?

MICHAELS: Of course I do. Tell me, if these real men are not homosexual, how can you have homosexual relations with them?

FRANKIE: How?

MICHAELS: Yes, how?

FRANKIE: Gee! Almost every real man will mess aroun'—it jus' has to be the right time and the right place. Especially if he's bin drinkin'.

MICHAELS: But wouldn't that make them homosexual?

FRANKIE: (Puzzled.) It would?

MICHAELS: He would be performing a homosexual act.

FRANKIE: (Not getting it.) If you say so.

MICHAELS: If you can convince me that you are a homosexual, there is a very good chance you will receive a Medical Discharge and all of the benefits of the G.I. Bill.

FRANKIE: Captain Brucey says that no matter what, I get either an Undesirable or a Dishonorable Discharge.

MICHAELS: Most of the Undesirable Discharges have been issued to sailors who have been caught in the act.

FRANKIE: Nobody ever catches me in the act, sir.

MICHAELS: Tell me, Frankie. Have you ever made advances or performed a homosexual act with any of the crew of the U.S.S. Swanson?

FRANKIE: No, sir.

MICHAELS: (Taking notes.) Have you ever performed a homosexual act with any of the crew of the Swanson while you were on liberty?

FRANKIE: Nope.

MICHAELS: Frankie, let's talk a little bit about your homosexuality before you joined the Navy. What was your first experience?

FRANKIE: Late at night when I'm selling the paper, I go into this toilet in the park to take a leak, an' this guy—he's got a great big boner on, an' he winks at me an'

whispers, "You wanna kiss it, kid?" I tell him I don' do things like that, but he says it's fashionable—he says ever'body is doin' it.

MICHAELS: Did he convince you?

FRANKIE: He don' hafta convince me. He's a real dream walkin'.

MICHAELS: Hmmm. I see.

FRANKIE: I think I'm aroun' twelve, an' I'm livin' in this foster home. I sell the Post-Gazette, an' this fella—he tells me he's a magician—well—he takes me to this really high-tone of a house, an' he, uh—he browns me, an' he gives me a quarter, an'—

MICHAELS: Browns? Browns?

FRANKIE: Screws me, sir, in my rear end, sir.

MICHAELS: He sodomized you?

FRANKIE: It hurts like hell the first time, but after a while I really, really enjoy it, sir. (Smiles.)

MICHAELS: (Nods his head.) What was your next experience?

FRANKIE: I got a real good one for you. Reverend James.

MICHAELS: A member of the clergy?

FRANKIE: Huh?

MICHAELS: A preacher, a priest?

FRANKIE: Gosh, he goes aroun' with this white collar and a black suit, but he ain't got a church. Mrs. Glenn—she's another one of my foster mothers—she runs this rooming house—she's always yellin' at him, "Where's your church, you pissant of a preacher?" So this one day, Reverend James—I'm up in his room. He finishes reading to me from Genesis—in the Bible. He tickles me, and one thing leads to another—he jacks me off.

MICHAELS: (Eagerly.) Is that all he did to you?

FRANKIE: Then he, uh—sodom—?

MICHAELS: —ized. Sodomized.

FRANKIE: (Thinking hard.) Sodom-izes me, but—but it don' matter none even though he's ugly. Reverend James—he's okey-dokey. He buys me a beautiful Bible for my birthday. He reads all the poetry and short stories I write—says they're really good, and I can end up as a famous author—but I gotta tell you—I don' finish high school, y'know?

MICHAELS: (Looks at file.) I see your father died when you were eight years old.

FRANKIE: Uh-huh.

MICHAELS: How do you feel about him?

FRANKIE: (Angry.) I don' feel nothin' 'bout him. Nothin'!

MICHAELS: Did he ever strike you?

FRANKIE: He beats the bejesus outta me with his razor strop. I guess it was becuz I never do nothin' right, y'know?

MICHAELS: Frankie, do you want to be beaten up all your life?

FRANKIE: Heck no, I don'.

MICHAELS: Then why are you always setting up situations where you get punished?

FRANKIE: I am?

MICHAELS: (Looks at file.) Boot camp in San Diego. You were over the hill, and—

FRANKIE: Gee! I guess I drink too much, an' I pass out, an'—

MICHAELS: (Looking at file.) Radio School in Los Angeles. You could've been rated Radioman Third Class, but you got a Deck Court Martial for—

FRANKIE: Gee! A Deck ain't that much. Lefty has two or three of 'em.

MICHAELS: (Shakes his head.) Franko Borkovich! It seems that trouble follows you wherever you go.

FRANKIE: I guess you're right. I keep getting' into jams, y'know?

(MICHAELS stands up. Puts his hand on FRANKIE's shoulder.)

MICHAELS: I think I can help you, son.

FRANKIE: (Brightens.) Really?

MICHAELS: But only if you want to change your destructive pattern.

FRANKIE: All I know is I don' wanna git in any more jams.

MICHAELS: Good, Frankie, good. If you want to change that behavior, it is quite simple.

FRANKIE: It is? Really?

MICHAELS: Frankie, a really excellent writer must understand himself before he can understand other people, and he must write honestly about them. That involves nothing but the truth.

FRANKIE: Golly, I never thought of it like that before, y'know?

MICHAELS: Don't you think it's about time?

FRANKIE: Uh—I guess—maybe—maybe, uh—do you think—you wanna hear the truth 'bout me and Lefty?

MICHAELS: It doesn't matter what I think. I want you to do what you feel like doing.

FRANKIE: But, Doc, I don't wanna get Lefty in hot water.

MICHAELS: (Looks at folder.) Frankie, loyalty is a commendable trait, but every man is responsible for his own actions. For the past fifteen years, Lefko's been in one difficult situation after another. He's had two Deck Court Martials, and was found innocent on a Summary Court Martial because the chief witness went over the hill.

FRANKIE: But—but he's a really swell guy. He—

MICHAELS: He will continue to be in and out of trouble whether it's Zeke Landis or some other kid fresh from boot camp.

FRANKIE: (Upset.) Oh, boy! Zeke Landis, huh?

MICHAELS: That is correct. Just a few days ago Lefko was in the head with the kid, and—

FRANKIE: Jus'—jus' a few days ago?

MICHAELS: Everybody aboard ship knows that Landis is dropping the soap for Lefty.

FRANKIE: (Walks around the chair in a fury.) That fucker! That son of a bitch! While I'm—I mean—me—me in the brig, and he's brownin' Landis. I—I—(Walks around chair.) Okay! Okay! You wanna hear all 'bout that prick and me? It all starts when I first come aboard. He gives me a Butterfinger, an'—

(There is a very loud knock on the door.)

MICHAELS: (Jumps up and hisses at FRANKIE.) Oh, God, Captain Brucey! (Motions to FRANKIE.) Attention! Toe the line!

(FRANKIE quickly stands at attention. MICHAELS quickly unlocks the door. DUBOIS shuffles into the Wardroom with a coffeepot and cups.)

DUBOIS: (His Stepin-Fetchit routine.) Some steamin' hot joe, Lieutenant, suh!

MICHAELS: Can't you see that I'm in consultation? Why you—!

DUBOIS: Consul-what, suh?

MICHAELS: (Furious.) Get out of here!

DUBOIS: Sorry, boss, suh! (MICHAELS is mumbling under his breath. DUBOIS looks at FRANKIE and shakes his head. Whispers.) Don't!

MICHAELS: (Whirls around.) What did you say, boy?

DUBOIS: (Moves quickly toward MICHAELS.) I got me this greenie in my throat, boss, sir. Jus'—jus' tryin'—(Coughs in MICHAELS's face.)

MICHAELS: (As he pulls away.) Dismissed!

DUBOIS: You don' wan' this steamin' hot java, suh?

MICHAELS: Get out of here! On the double!

DUBOIS: This nigger is done gone, boss, suh! (Winks at FRANKIE, then exits. Leaves door open.)

MICHAELS: Subhuman. Yes, a subhuman Negro. Well, they all are! (Pause.) That is a proven scientific fact. (Pause.) You can sit down, Frankie. (FRANKIE sits.

MICHAELS pushes the pack of cigarettes toward FRANKIE, who quickly takes a cigarette. MICHAELS lights it for him, then he lights himself a fresh cigarette from his old one.) Ah—let's see. Where were we? (FRANKIE shrugs his shoulders.) Ah, yes. You and Chief Petty Officer Leonard Lefko.

FRANKIE: Gee, Lieutenant Michaels, I already tol' Captain Brucey all about me and Lefty.

MICHAELS: I don't quite—

FRANKIE: I tol' him how we're buddies.

MICHAELS: Buddies?

FRANKIE: Yeah, buddies, Doc.

MICHAELS: I'm afraid I—I don't understand, Frankie.

FRANKIE: Uh—Lefty gives me pogey bait and he gooses me a coupla times, but—but that's it. Like I tell Captain Goosey, ever'body gooses ever'body else.

MICHAELS: Just before that, uh—that inky-dink boy from the galley came in, you started to tell me the truth about what really happened between you and Lefko, and then—?

FRANKIE: Didn't I jus' tell you, sir?

MICHAELS: Frankie, it is hard for me to believe that—

FRANKIE: You teach me how to tell the truth, so I tell the truth, Doc.

MICHAELS: But you just—

FRANKIE: If you wan' me to—I'll swear on the Bible.

MICHAELS: Franko Borkovich, I—why are you looking at the floor. Why—?

FRANKIE: Deck, Doc. It's the deck.

MICHAELS: Look me in the eye, Franko!

FRANKIE: (Looks MICHAELS in the eye.) You wan' I should swear on the Bible?

MICHAELS: Ah, Franko! Franko! Franko! (Sighs deeply, then looks at his watch.) My allotted time is up. I would like to see you tomorrow.

FRANKIE: You would like to see me—?

MICHAELS: Tomorrow at oh-nine hundred.

FRANKIE: I don' wanna see you no more.

MICHAELS: You—? Franko, doesn't it beat standing at attention in front of Captain Goosey?

FRANKIE: (Very angry.) Y'know, I really think you're tryin' to help me, but you ain't—you ain't! The truth is—the truth is—yeah—you're tryin' to trap me—get me to spill the beans on Lefty.

MICHAELS: Franko, you are exhibiting the classic masochistic pattern. Everyone in authority is out to get you—the whole world is against you. Paranoia is—

FRANKIE: Screw you an' your highfalutin words. You're jus'—

MICHAELS: You're trying to get me to punish you. You—you—

(CAPTAIN BRUCEY is standing in the doorway. FRANKIE and MICHAELS can't see him.)

FRANKIE: Okay! Okay! I know one thing, and that is—heck—there's only one difference between you and Captain Goosey—that's you use big words a lot better.

MICHAELS: (Losing his cool.) Why you little fairy! How dare you compare me to—

CAPTAIN: Captain Goosey? (FRANKIE and MICHAELS face the door. CAPTAIN BRUCEY enters.) That's the biggest insult of all, isn't it, Michaels? (Laughs.) You were so sure of yourself—so sure you could get the little pansy to spill the beans on Lefty Lefko. (Moves center stage.) Get the hell out of here! You hear me loud and clear?

MICHAELS: Aye, aye, sir! (Grabs his cigarettes and exits.)

(CAPTAIN BRUCEY stares at FRANKIE. Nods his head and smiles.)

CAPTAIN: There's more to you than meets the eye, Borkovick.

(Blackout.)

SCENE THREE

(Lights up on the Wardroom, December 31st, 0700 hours. CAPTAIN BRUCEY is at his desk. There is a knock on the door.)

CAPTAIN: Enter!

(GIUM enters. He is carrying a bucket and has a handkerchief to his mouth. He is bent over. He is pretending to be seasick, but he is overdoing it.)

GIUM: Sir, I'm putting in a request to be relieved of duty. (Faces upstage and pretends to upchuck into the bucket.) I haven't slept all night, sir.

CAPTAIN: Nobody has. The storm was a dilly.

GIUM: Can't you see, sir, I'm—?

CAPTAIN: Seasick?

GIUM: Yes, Captain.

CAPTAIN: You're my right-hand man, and I need you today of all days, Yeoman—um?

GIUM: George Gium, sir.

CAPTAIN: You must know that.

GIUM: But, sir, I—

(There is a knock on the door.)

CAPTAIN: Bring him in.

(GIUM exits. He re-enters with FRANKIE, who has his hands handcuffed in front of him. GIUM leads FRANKIE to where he must toe the line.)

CAPTAIN: (Smiling.) Well, well—how are you doing, Borkovich?

FRANKIE: Golly! You say my name right, sir.

CAPTAIN: What are you—?

FRANKIE: You say it with an "H" instead of usin' a "K."

CAPTAIN: (Sarcastic) Well, thank you very much.

FRANKIE: You're welcome, sir.

CAPTAIN: (Shakes his head.) You will never learn.

FRANKIE: Learn what, sir?

CAPTAIN: Full of piss and vinegar, this morning, are we? Hmmm. (Picks up a file.) We're going to get right down to Lieutenant Michaels's report.

FRANKIE: The report on me?

CAPTAIN: No, the one on the man in the moon. Listen to this. (Opens the file and reads.) "Apprentice Seaman Franko Borkovich tells a tale of introducing heterosexual men into a twilight world of degenerate sex. He is a classic case of paranoid schizophrenia. In the paranoid form of his disorder, he has developed delusions of persecution. He has been in the Navy for only twelve months, but he has been in trouble constantly. A thorough examination of his record shows a pattern of compulsive masochism that is explained by a type of paraphilia that is a destructive attitude in which the individual turns inward upon himself instead of outward upon others. In his case, it is coupled with sadism, in which pleasure is derived from the infliction of pain or humiliation, either physical or psychological. His deep-seated anger could very well explode into violence against himself and/or others."

FRANKIE: So Lieutenant Michaels—he writes that, sir?

CAPTAIN: That is correct.

FRANKIE: He must be really, really pissed at me, sir.

CAPTAIN: I'm afraid he's not in love with you.

FRANKIE: You can say that again.

CAPTAIN: Do you understand it?

FRANKIE: What's paraph—?

CAPTAIN: (Looks at file.) Here's a footnote. "Paraphilia: a term that describes persistent, intense fantasies."

FRANKIE: I got me lots and lots of fantasies about guys.

CAPTAIN: Just listen, smart aleck. "Behaviors involving sexual arousal—pain and humiliation by oneself or a stranger."

FRANKIE: He says I'm loony, huh?

CAPTAIN: We will arrive at the Brooklyn Navy Yard in thirty-six hours. Two S.P.s will transfer you to the violent ward at Saint Albans Naval Hospital on Long Island. You will be with a big, happy family of murderers and deserters—nice, friendly types.

FRANKIE: Really, sir?

CAPTAIN: Really, Borkovick. But I want you to know—I don't have anything against you.

FRANKIE: You don'?

CAPTAIN: You're a spunky kid.

FRANKIE: You think so, sir?

CAPTAIN: However, I know you're protecting that no-good son of a bitch, Lefty Lefko.

FRANKIE: I ain't protectin' nobody, sir.

CAPTAIN: If you confess, you'll go scot-free. You'll be at liberty as soon as we hit the beach—about thirty-six hours.

FRANKIE: I tell you all the things I know, Captain Brucey.

CAPTAIN: Well, if that's the way you want it. Do you understand that you are digging your own grave?

FRANKIE: I jus'—nothin' to confess, sir.

CAPTAIN: (Turns to GIUM. Holds out his hand.) I'll have it now.

GIUM: Um—you'll have what, sir?

CAPTAIN: You know exactly what I'm talking about.

GIUM: You mean, um—that?

CAPTAIN: Yes, your sworn statement.

GIUM: It's not really a sworn statement, sir. You see, there is no notary public aboard, sir.

CAPTAIN: Give it to me, Yeoman!

GIUM: Gee, I've got it—(Shuffles through a file of papers.)

CAPTAIN: On the double!

GIUM: Let's see, I—

CAPTAIN: I want it before we march into Berlin!

GIUM: Um—here it is—(Hands the statement to CAPTAIN BRUCEY.)

CAPTAIN: It's all over but the shouting, Borkovick. (Waves the statement in front of FRANKIE's face.) This is an affidavit, and if you ask me what's an affidavit, I'll gag you.

FRANKIE: I know all along what an affi—affidavit is, Captain.

CAPTAIN: I'll wager you didn't know that it's signed by Yeoman Second Class George S. Gium. He spilled the beans on you and Lefty.

FRANKIE: Ain't no beans to spill, sir.

CAPTAIN: (Continues to wave the statement.) This proves that Chief Petty Officer Leonard Lefko is a sodomite. It is a statement that you confessed to Yeoman Second Class George S. Gium that Lefty buggered you behind the Twenty-millimeters. This report will put you away—you'll be pounding rocks for the next twenty years, Borkovick.

FRANKIE: (As he looks at GIUM.) So that's the way it is, huh, Gium?
(GIUM looks at the floor.)

CAPTAIN: (A big smile.) Yes, that's the way it is. (He and FRANKIE stare at each other for at least five seconds.)

FRANKIE: So—I'm ready to spill the beans, Captain Brucey.

CAPTAIN: Well, it's about time.

FRANKIE: I'm gonna tell the truth and nothin' but the truth, Captain!

CAPTAIN: Yeoman, get this down—word for word.

GIUM: (Sullenly.) Aye, aye, sir.

FRANKIE: It goes like this, Captain Goosey, uh—Brucey. When I first come aboard the Swanson from Pier Ninety-two in New York City, I'm lonely and ascaired to death—I don't know the bridge from the fantail—don' know a ditty bag from a mudpuppy, an'—an' then I'm on the Swanson, an'—it looks like a tugboat.

CAPTAIN: (Fuming.) Tugboat? Tugboat?

FRANKIE: It don' look like a tugboat now, Captain, sir, but that's what I think back then, sir.

CAPTAIN: I don't need the story of your life, Borkovick.

FRANKIE: Okey-dokey, sir. It's jus' before the invasion, sir—I'm only aboard two days. Well, Captain, it's real late at night, an' I'm standin' next to the Twenty-millimeters, an' I feel this hand—it's goosin' me, but it isn't a regular goose, sir—it goes all the way up there, and I jump half a mile. I turn aroun', and there he is—he's standin' with this Butterfinger in his hand and a great big smile on his face. "Welcome to the U.S.S Swanson," he says. I—

CAPTAIN: Ah—Chief Petty Officer Leonard Lefko!

FRANKIE: I don' say it's Lefty, sir.

CAPTAIN: What? What?

FRANKIE: It's him—(Points to GIUM.) Yeoman Second Class George S. Gium, Captain Brucey. He even asks me how big my prick is, and then he grabs it, an'—

GIUM: (Doubles up his fists.) You calling me a fuckin' queer?

FRANKIE: I don' call you nothin'. I only say what I see.

GIUM: Why you—!

(GIUM rushes over to FRANKIE with clenched fists. He throws a punch at FRANKIE, who tries to defend himself. FRANKIE falls to the floor with GIUM on top of him. CAPTAIN BRUCEY restrains GIUM, then helps FRANKIE to his feet.)

FRANKIE: When I hit the beach, I'll write a sworn statement tellin' all 'bout George Gium and what he does to me.

GIUM: I'll kill the little cocksucker! I'll—

CAPTAIN: Shut the fuck up, Yeoman!

GIUM: Jesus! If this gets around to the crew—that son of a bitch accusing me of being like that, I—

FRANKIE: I don' got the biggest prick in the world, but Gium—he can't keep his hands off of it.

(GIUM makes another lunge at FRANKIE. CAPTAIN BRUCEY gives GIUM a shove.)

CAPTAIN: Sit, Yeoman! That's an order!

(GIUM gives CAPTAIN BRUCEY a dirty look, but he finally sits down.)

FRANKIE: Captain, if you don' let me sign a statement, I'll sign it when I get to Saint Albans, where you say I'm gonna go. I'm gonna say that Yeoman Second Class George Gium is a pogue, a pansy, a fairy, a queer—jus' like me!

(CAPTAIN BRUCEY slaps FRANKIE.)

CAPTAIN: Do you realize that as the Captain of the U.S.S. Swanson, I could have you thrown overboard, and no one would know the difference?

FRANKIE: I hear you loud an' clear, Captain Goosey!

CAPTAIN: Attention! Toe the line!

FRANKIE: (Snarls the words.) Aye, aye, sir! (Stands at attention and toes the line.) By the way, Captain, Gium tells me all about—(CAPTAIN BRUCEY takes tape and a piece of paper from drawer.) how you an' Lefty drink up a storm, an' you go to this hotel room, an'—an'—

(CAPTAIN BRUCEY wads up the paper and jams it into FRANKIE's mouth, then winds the tape around FRANKIE's head. FRANKIE tries to continue speaking, but can mutter only muffled sounds.)

GIUM: (Stands up.) I'm withdrawing my statement, sir.

CAPTAIN: There is no way you can do that.

GIUM: (Very agitated.) I wash my hands of it. I—

CAPTAIN: Calm down! Calm down!

GIUM: You're not so calm yourself, sir.

CAPTAIN: Don't get smart with me!

GIUM: But, sir, I—

CAPTAIN: Are you saying you lied on this statement?

GIUM: Yes, sir, I am, sir.

CAPTAIN: Do you know what it means to make a false accusation against a Chief Petty Officer?

GIUM: You put me up to it, sir.

CAPTAIN: I didn't do anything of the kind.

GIUM: How come you're making me a Yeoman First Class? How come, Captain?

CAPTAIN: If you lied on this statement, you will end up with a General Court Martial and time in the brig—run by the jarheads! You hear me loud and clear, Yeoman?

GIUM: (After a moment.) I, um—hear you, Captain.

CAPTAIN: (Holds the statement in front of GIUM.) Is this the truth?

GIUM: (Defeated.) It's the truth, Captain Brucey.

CAPTAIN: (Puts statement in filing cabinet, locks it, and puts key in top drawer of desk.) It's going to put you away for a long time, Borkovick. You are in shit up to your ears because of that candy-ass Lefko. You—(There is a very loud honk on the intercom. CAPTAIN BRUCEY rushes upstage and puts earphones to his ears.) Yes? Yes? (Pause.) Picked up on the sonar sounding? Order General Quarters, Boson. (Takes off earphones.) Yeoman, stay here and guard the prisoner.

GIUM: My battle station—it's ash-can port, sir.

CAPTAIN: Then get to your battle station—on the double! (GIUM exits. CAPTAIN BRUCEY heads for the exit.) Guard? Guard? Holy shit! (Exits. We hear the Boson's whistle.)

VOICE ON LOUDSPEAKER: Now hear this! Now hear this! General Quarters! All hands on Battle Stations. Prepare to fire depth charges! Now hear this! Battle Stations! Battle Stations! Prepare to fire ash-cans! Prepare to fire ash-cans! Now hear this! Battle Stations!

(Lights flash off and on. FRANKIE manages to sit down. DUBOIS enters. He takes the tape from FRANKIE's mouth. FRANKIE spits out the wad of paper. DUBOIS lights a cigarette and holds it to FRANKIE's lips. FRANKIE takes a deep drag. DUBOIS moves to CAPTAIN BRUCEY's desk, opens a drawer, takes out a bottle of whiskey, holds up the bottle, then moves to FRANKIE and pours some of the whiskey into FRANKIE's mouth.)

FRANKIE: (Shivers.) Whewie! Y'know, you is right about Gium.

DUBOIS: That jive turkey.

FRANKIE: I still—he does it for a lousy fuckin' rating.

DUBOIS: Some sailors would murder their mothers for a higher rating.

FRANKIE: Really?

DUBOIS: You were beautiful, Frankie.

FRANKIE: Beautiful?

DUBOIS: The way you lowered the boom on ol' Goosey. I split a gut laughing.

FRANKIE: How did you—?

DUBOIS: I had my ear to the bulkhead.

FRANKIE: Oh.

DUBOIS: You were cooking with gas.

FRANKIE: Then what? Here I am, handcuffed. Maybe they're right about me. Could be—maybe I'm crazy.

DUBOIS: The other way 'round—they're the ones who are whacko.

FRANKIE: But Lefty—he's a real liar. Here I am—I keep him outta hot water, and what does he do? He keeps fuckin' aroun' with—with—with—? I can't even think of his name, for cryin' out loud.

DUBOIS: Zeke Landis.

FRANKIE: Yeah, fuckin'—fuckin' Landis. He—

DUBOIS: Just hold your horses, Frankie. Lieutenant Michaels cooked up that story just to get you to spill the beans on Lefty.

FRANKIE: You—you—think so?

DUBOIS: Do you know what Zeke's favorite pastime is? When he's on liberty, he rolls a pansy and spends the money at a sportin' house.

FRANKIE: What's a sportin' house?

DUBOIS: A whorehouse.

FRANKIE: Oh, so you don't think Lefty is messin' aroun' with—?

DUBOIS: Lefty's a straight-shooter, Frankie. Four-oh in my book.

FRANKIE: You really, really think so?

DUBOIS: How many times you want me to tell you?

FRANKIE: Ah—Dubois? You're really—you are a swell pal, y'know? (There is the sound of depth charges being dropped.) Holy Moses! I hope we don't get torpedoed.

DUBOIS: Frankie, U-boats don't come this close to the States—we're as safe as if we were in the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

FRANKIE: Then why the battle stations?

DUBOIS: I figured the sonar picked up a whale or a school of fish.

FRANKIE: Boy, I hope so. (Moves upstage. Looks at the filing cabinet.) Gee, I want to do it, but—

DUBOIS: What? What?

FRANKIE: (Points with his head to the filing cabinet.) That statement—the one that Gium signs? Ol' Goosey's got it in there. The key's in the top drawer.

DUBOIS: Gotcha, kiddo! (Gets key from drawer, opens filing cabinet. Looks through folder. Grins as he holds up GIUM's statement.) Franko Washington Borkovich. (Laughs.) Washington?

FRANKIE: My mom says she names me after him, but when I look at my birth certificate, there ain't no Washington—just Franko.

DUBOIS: Did you know Washington had wooden teeth?

FRANKIE: Nope.

DUBOIS: (Goes to desk. Gets CAPTAIN BRUCEY's flame-thrower of a lighter.

Becomes Stepin Fetchit.) Diddy-wah-diddy. Dubois Garvey Lambert is a good inky-dink! He do what Captain Goosey tell him to do. (Lights statement.) Burn, baby, burn. (Drops statement into trashcan. FRANKIE puts his foot into the trashcan and stomps out the fire.) Ashes, nothing but ashes.

FRANKIE: Golly, Dubois, I don' want you to get in dutch. What if Captain Goosey—?

DUBOIS: (His Stepin-Fetchit routine.) Wh-what, boss, suh? Ah is just a dumb-assed darkie. (Back to his real self.) It's George Gium—he's the sucker who's going to get it up the old kazoo. Goosey's going to think Gium burned it.

FRANKIE: But so what? Heck, Captain Goosey is gonna git Gium to sign another one.

DUBOIS: I'm not so sure about that, Frankie.

FRANKIE: I don'—?

DUBOIS: What if you strike a deal with Gium?

FRANKIE: A deal?

DUBOIS: I bet he comes running to you to make a deal. He won't sign an affidavit if you promise not to accuse him of making a pass at you.

FRANKIE: You think so, huh?

DUBOIS: It's worth a try, Frankie. Look, one thing is for sure. When you get to Saint Albans, you are going to be interrogated. Stick to your story—that you never—never—screwed around with Lefty or any of the other sailors. You dig?

FRANKIE: Uh-huh. Uh—I dig.

DUBOIS: Do that, and maybe—just maybe—that is, if Gium doesn't sign another statement—well—you won't end up with a Dishonorable Discharge.

FRANKIE: I won't?

DUBOIS: You'll get a yellow discharge.

FRANKIE: What's that?

DUBOIS: An Undesirable Discharge.

FRANKIE: That the one for queers?

DUBOIS: But—but you'll be a free man.

FRANKIE: One thing for sure, Dubois—I ain't gonna change my story.

DUBOIS: This kitchen mechanic wishes he had your courage.

FRANKIE: You got to be kidding! I think you is a real brave bozo.

DUBOIS: I don't have the guts to tell Captain Goosey I'm, uh—A.C./D.C.

FRANKIE: What's that?

DUBOIS: I'm double-gated.

FRANKIE: Wow! You mean you like girls, too?

DUBOIS: (Nods his head.) But I'll probably end up being cannon fodder in Italy—looks like that's where the Swanson's headed next.

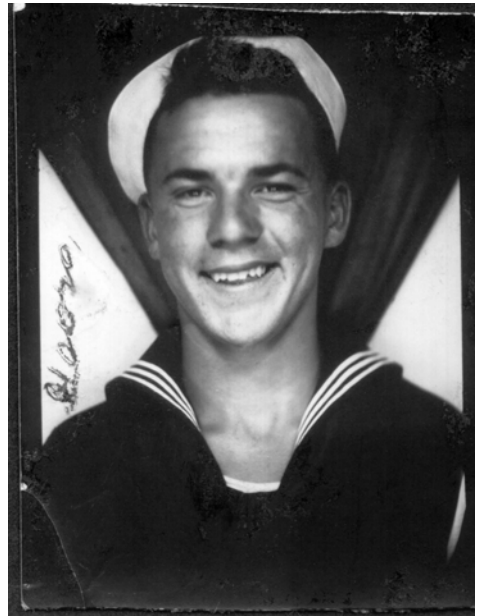
FRANKIE: (Moves closer to DUBOIS.) Gee, Dubois. I wish, uh—no way I can put my arms aroun' you, y'know?

DUBOIS: Let's see. The other keys—the keys—the keys. Where are they?

(DUBOIS looks through the drawers of the desk, but he can't find them. The lights change into a rainbow of colors as DUBOIS takes FRANKIE's face in his hands. He kisses him on each cheek, then takes him in his arms and kisses him passionately. Song: Vera Lynn—"The White Cliffs of Dover.")

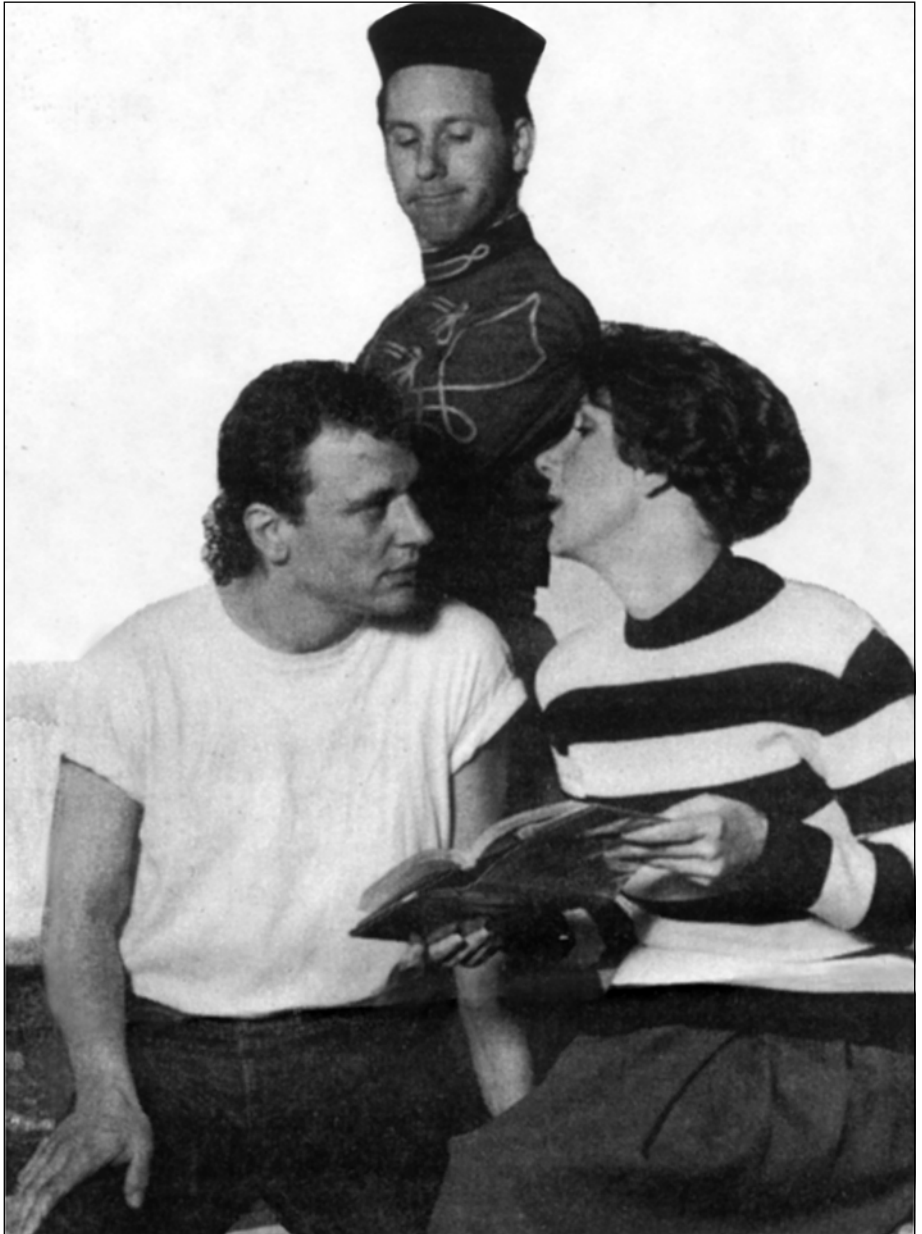
"There'll be bluebirds over
The white cliffs of Dover
Tomorrow
Just you wait and see
There'll be joy and laughter
And peace ever after
Tomorrow
When the world is free
The shepherd will count his sheep
The valleys will bloom again
And Jimmy will go to sleep
In his own little room again
There'll be bluebirds over
The white cliffs of Dover
Tomorrow
Just you wait and see."

CURTAIN



Apprentice Seaman George Birimisa at age 18, just before shipping out for North Africa aboard the USS Swanson, 1942.

Photo booth in Norfolk, Virginia



Erik Kever Ryle as Joey Jurovich, Darrow Carson as Adrian Ross, and Carol Avery as Dinah Donnelly in the 1993 Theatre Rhinoceros production directed by Paul Sagan.

Photo by Steve Savage

THE MAN WITH STRAIGHT HAIR

(Formerly *A Rainbow in the Night*), 1978

A Play in Three Acts

The Man with Straight Hair opened at the Matrix Theatre in Los Angeles on February 14th, 1978, under the original title *A Rainbow in the Night*. It was directed by James Monroe Stinson, with Grainger Hines as Joey, Susan Barnes as Dinah, Peter Lazer as Adrian, Joan Vigman as Darlene, Maria Wida as Mrs. Buzhardt, and Terrence McNally as Skylar Morris; original music by Mario Padilla, and set design by Gonzalez and Wright.

In one review of *A Rainbow in the Night*, Jim Ingolio, writing in *The Daily Breeze*, said: "Roll the red carpet down Melrose Avenue. A new playwright has come to town. George Birimisa writes with the emotional strength of Tennessee Williams, the artistry of Eugene O'Neill, and the verve of Paul Zindel."

The Man with Straight Hair received its première in the version published here at Theatre Rhinoceros in San Francisco in January of 1994, directed by Paul Sagan, with the following cast:

Adrian Ross	Darrow Carson
Joey Jurovich	Erik Kever Ryle
Dinah Donnelly	Carol Avery
Darlene Ross.....	Cristina Gomez

An early draft was performed as a staged reading on May 17, 1992 at Josie's Cabaret and Juice Joint, directed by Paul Sagan, with John Hogan as Adrian, David Perez as Joey, Nancy Lee Russell as Dinah, Jean Mullis as Darlene, Donna Davis as Mrs. Buzhardt, and Kelly Hill as Skylar Morris. These actors, as well as Tim Flanagan and Amy Gollnick, helped immeasurably in shaping the final script.

CHARACTERS:

ADRIAN ROSS, 30: High-strung with a good sense of humor. Glib and shallow on the surface, but with a deep emotional interior. Madly in love with Joey.

JOEY JUROVICH, 25: Virile—extra butch. Intense. Didn't finish high school. Low self-image—very angry, with confused sexuality.

DINAH DONNELLY, 34: Determined. On-again, off-again article writer. A constant battle not to be defeated by life or by being a woman in the Fifties.

DARLENE ROSS, 22: Adrian's younger sister. Knows what she wants—men. Loves Adrian.

THE TIME: 1953.

THE SET:

JOEY and ADRIAN's apartment in the Bowery in Manhattan. Stage center is the living room. Police lock on the door. Upstage, a chest of drawers; downstage right is

JOEY's desk and a huge dictionary. A love seat. Kitchen is stage left. Bedroom and bathroom off left.

Stage right, on a platform, is DINAH's basement room. Very small, no windows. It is next to the furnace with overhead pipes. A large photo of Albert Einstein on the wall.

In the Theatre Rhinoceros production, the set was on a revolving stage that was hand-turned.

ACT I

SCENE ONE

(Saturday night. One A.M. July, and the temperature is in the 90s and humid. Radio up loud. Frankie Laine: "Black and Blue." As the curtain rises, ADRIAN finishes sorting laundry. Stage right, DINAH sits on her bed. She doubles over with a cramp. Then she lights a cigarette. She is in pain. Frankie Laine finishes singing, and Chiquita Banana commercial begins: "I'm Chiquita Banana and I've come to say, bananas have to ripen in a certain way. When they are fleck'd with brown and have a golden hue, bananas taste the best and are best for you. You can put them in a salad, you can put them in a pie-aye. Any way you want to eat them, it's impossible to beat them. But bananas like the climate of the very, very tropical equator, so you should never put bananas in the refrigerator." Then a new song: Doris Day singing "Qué Será, Será." ADRIAN smiles, turns it up. He grabs chenille bedspread, throws it over his shoulders, and begins to dance as he sings along with the music.)

ADRIAN: "When I was just a little girl I asked my mother what would I be? Would I be pretty—would I be gay—here's what she said to me: Qué será, será, whatever will be, will be. The future's not ours to see. Qué será, será."

(DINAH dials. Phone rings in JOEY and ADRIAN's apartment. ADRIAN picks up phone.)

ADRIAN: Sadie's House of Ill Repute. Sadie speaking.

(DINAH is startled, doesn't answer.)

ADRIAN: Joey, I know it's you.

(DINAH hangs up. Goes to bed and lies down, in pain.)

ADRIAN: (Picks up Mickey Spillane's *Vengeance* is Mine and reads.) "Insidious"? I didn't think Spillane used such big words—

(JOEY enters in a rush of energy.)

JOEY: Hi, babe!

ADRIAN: My God—my heart!

JOEY: Jesus, I need a beer.

ADRIAN: Don't talk like that. I'll get you an ice-cold lemonade.

JOEY: (Takes off T-shirt. Throws it on love seat.) That fuckin' Howard Johnson's. (Holds up right arm.) Twenty-eight flavors. Looks like gangrene.

ADRIAN: I'll draw you a nice, cool bath. (Hands washcloth to JOEY. Goes to fridge, gets lemonade. Hands it to JOEY.) How come you're home so early, hon?

JOEY: (Gulps down lemonade. Hands empty glass to ADRIAN. Takes off pants.) The sixty-four dollar question. I quit, babe.

ADRIAN: You—you actually quit Harriet Johnson's?

JOEY: Stop calling it that. I walked out in the middle of my shift.

ADRIAN: You—you did?

JOEY: I couldn't take it anymore. I just started my break, see? I take my first drag on a cigarette, and the new manager—Mr. Pierce—he yells at me, "Hey, Jurovich. Can't you see how busy it is? Get a clean apron and get behind the counter. You look like a pig."

ADRIAN: I know why he picked on you, hon. It's because of me. I remember the look of contempt on his face when I came into the store to get money for groceries.

JOEY: Come on, Adrian. It's not you. I didn't quit on account of Mr. Pierce. The customers—three deep at the counter—all of 'em screaming for service at once. Then this old bag yells, "Boy! I've been waiting a half-hour for my coffee ice-cream soda! I'm going to report you to the manager, boy!" So I yell, "I ain't no boy, lady!" I tear off my apron and zoom out the front door.

ADRIAN: Heavens! I wish I had your nerve.

JOEY: I saw red, Adrian. Just because I jerk sodas people think they can treat me like a piece of shit. It's the story of my life.

(JOEY exits to bedroom stage left. ADRIAN picks up T-shirt, pants, shoes, and socks, and puts them away.)

JOEY: (Offstage.) My T-shirts, Adrian?

ADRIAN: Top drawer of the bureau.

JOEY: (Enters putting on a clean T-shirt.) This place—it's a steam bath. I need a beer.

ADRIAN: Honey, do you realize it's been over a year since you had one too many?

JOEY: Boy! I feel like getting plastered. (Crosses to chair. Sits.) Well, Adrian? Your day? Any luck?

ADRIAN: (Puts cigarette in cigarette holder and lights it.) "My Day by Eleanor Roosevelt." Heavens, I filled out applications at two Schrafft'ses, but I could tell by the way they looked at me, hon, no cigar. Then I went to Childs on Broadway. Well, this smart aleck behind the cash register—he puts his hand on his hip and says, "We only hire counter-men." I was so humiliated, I—

JOEY: Babe, the guy's a fuckin' idiot.

ADRIAN: (Moves over to JOEY.) If only I was butch looking like you. I'm such a nellie queen.

JOEY: You're not. You're, uh—gentle.

ADRIAN: That's another word for swish, and you know it.

JOEY: Adrian, you gotta stop using that cigarette holder. (Takes a cigarette from ADRIAN's pack, puts it in his mouth. Lets it hang down like Bogart.) You gotta practice letting it hang out of the side of your mouth—see?

ADRIAN: (Takes cigarette out of holder, puts cigarette in mouth and looks in mirror.) Heavens! I look like Marlene Dietrich in *Destry Rides Again*.

JOEY: I see this queen—he's got plucked eyebrows, and he works behind the counter at Whelan's in the Village—the one on Eighth Street.

ADRIAN: You really saw a queen behind the counter at Whelan's with plucked eyebrows?

JOEY: To top it off, he's wearing pancake make-up.

ADRIAN: It does sound too good to be true, but I'll toddle down there and have a look-see.

JOEY: How long has it been—over a year since your last job?

ADRIAN: It's a little over seven months, Joey.

JOEY: Now that I'm out of work, it ain't gonna be easy getting by—you know?

ADRIAN: I know, hon. Hmmm. Plucked eyebrows and pancake make-up. (Rushes over to JOEY's typewriter and pats it.) If I can get a job at Whelan's, you can stay home and write your novel.

JOEY: How can I call it a novel when I'm still writing the first chapter?

ADRIAN: It's going to be a great novel, hon.

JOEY: Adrian, I don't want to talk about it.

ADRIAN: Okay, but that book you brought home by that Russian writer—what's—?

JOEY: (Mispronounces it.) Dos-to-vesky. I gave it back to Dinah.

ADRIAN: Oh, it's her book. I'll stick to Mickey Spillane—Vengeance is Mine.

JOEY: How can you read that trash?

ADRIAN: Ever since you've been seeing Dinah, you're high-toned. (Puts white tablecloth on kitchen table.) Uh—was Dinah in the store before your dramatic exit?

JOEY: I ain't seen her in I don't know how long.

ADRIAN: Gee! I hope she didn't fall into a manhole. I still think she wants to marry you.

JOEY: Dinah ain't like most girls.

ADRIAN: That's true, hon. She is writing for a Commie paper.

JOEY: *The National Guardian* is not a Commie paper. She wrote one article, uh—about John, uh—Reed, I think—the only American to ever be buried in the Kremlin.

ADRIAN: It's too boring for me. (Moves to JOEY's desk. Picks up letter.) Surprise, hon. Chanel Number Five.

JOEY: My mom—who else?

ADRIAN: It has an exotic foreign stamp on it. (Hands letter to JOEY.)

JOEY: (Sniffs it.) Jesus! She poured a whole bottle of perfume on it.

ADRIAN: Maybe she'll leave you all her money.

JOEY: She don't give a shit about me. (Sneezes twice.)

ADRIAN: God bless you, sweetie. You're evidently allergic to her perfume.

JOEY: I'm allergic to her.

ADRIAN: I'll read it. (JOEY hands letter to ADRIAN. ADRIAN opens it and holds up a five-dollar bill.) Five dollars!

JOEY: A lousy five dollars? (Grabs bill, tears it in two and throws it on the floor. Moves upstage.)

ADRIAN: Heavens to Betsy—it's real money! (Picks up the two pieces of the bill and puts them in his robe. Reads.) "Dearest Joey. How is my sweet little angel? I am visiting the graves of your grandparents in Dubrovnik on the beautiful Adriatic. Darling, the Communists are everywhere. I wear gloves so the Reds can't steal my five-thousand-dollar ring." Here it comes, hon. "Have you found a good Catholic girl? You need a devoted wife. Love and kisses, Mother." Hon, I can't imagine how you ended up in an orphanage. After all, she is well-to-do.

JOEY: Yeah—she dressed me up in fucking red velvet—always fooling around with my peter. When I'm six she runs off with this fuckin' old fart—she's out of my life.

ADRIAN: I thought I had a horrendous childhood, honey.

(JOEY sits on love seat, dejected.)

ADRIAN: (Gets sandwiches and puts them on table.) Shrimp-salad sandwiches. Our midnight snack.

JOEY: Ain't hungry.

(ADRIAN goes over to JOEY, kisses him on the back of the neck. He is consoling him.

JOEY pulls ADRIAN around—onto his lap. This is a moment of intimacy; the kiss is tender.)

ADRIAN: Oh, honey, I—

(DINAH is dialing in her room. Their phone rings.)

JOEY: If it's Howard Johnson's, I ain't here.

ADRIAN: (Answers phone.) Hello?

DINAH: Hello? This is Dinah Donnelly. Is Joseph there?

ADRIAN: (Hands over receiver.) It's that female.

JOEY: (Into phone.) Dinah?

DINAH: Hi, Joseph. Just in case you don't recognize my voice, I'm the—

JOEY: (Excited. Eager.) How could I forget you? You're the only published writer I know.

DINAH: My one and only was published six months ago.

JOEY: Gee! You don't sound so hot. Uh—

DINAH: It's the influenza—I'm in and out of bed. I'm having a nicotine fit. Is there any chance you could drop off a pack of Pall Malls?

JOEY: What's your address?

DINAH: Two-twenty East Tenth.

(JOEY looks for pencil.)

JOEY: Just a sec. (Snaps his fingers at ADRIAN.) Pencil, Adrian! (ADRIAN gives him a pencil.)

DINAH: Two-twenty East Tenth. It's near Tompkins Square Park. It's in the basement. I better give you my telephone number, too. Canal 4-9929.

JOEY: (Writes it down.) Bye, Dinah.

(ADRIAN moves to JOEY. Starts to put his arms around him, but JOEY pushes him away. JOEY grabs his jeans and puts them on.)

JOEY: Dinah's got the influenza. I'm going to drop her off a pack of Pall Malls. (Buttons pants. Puts on shoes.) My keys! (ADRIAN hands them to him.) Be right back. Save the sandwiches. (Rushes out the door.)

ADRIAN: (Locks the door.) Men! They're so gullible. (Picks up the phone after a moment and dials.) What's playing tomorrow? How to Marry a Millionaire and Broken Arrow? (Sits on love seat. Picks up Mickey Spillane novel.) Hmmm. Jeff Chandler bare-chested as an Indian. But—but I can't.

SCENE TWO

(Lights up on DINAH's room. A loud knock on her door.)

DINAH: Just a second, Joseph. (Puts out cigarette and waves her hand to dispel the smoke. Opens the door.) Welcome to the Lower Depths, Joseph.

JOEY: Uh—here. (Hands her the cigarettes.)

DINAH: Two packs? Why, thank you. (Gets purse from table.)

JOEY: They're on me.

DINAH: Well, if you insist. But come in! Come in!

JOEY: Uh—I can only stay a few minutes.

(JOEY awkwardly, almost timidly, enters room. DINAH closes and locks the door.)

DINAH: My only chair. (Takes a stack of books from the chair. JOEY sits.)

JOEY: The pipes, uh—where do they go to?

DINAH: To the furnace behind the wall. (Roots through stack of books on the floor.) You must read this, Joseph.

JOEY: Lie Down in Darkness?

DINAH: It's the story of Peyton Loftis, who—

JOEY: A high-class name for a guy, huh?

DINAH: Peyton Loftis is a girl.

JOEY: That's how much I know. Uh—what's it about?

DINAH: Materialism in American society. The failure of parents to pass any values to their children. Take it with you, Joseph.

JOEY: Uh—I quit my job.

DINAH: Didn't you say it was the only job that didn't drive you nuts?

JOEY: That was before they hired the new night manager—Mr. Pierce. Uh—Adrian came into the store a couple of times, and I saw Mr. Pierce giving him a dirty look. Then Mr. Pierce started calling me "double-gated." I guess it's because both you and Adrian were always sitting on my station—and Adrian—well—you know.

DINAH: Does Adrian know about this?

JOEY: I told him I quit because of the heat wave—the customers three deep.

DINAH: That was very considerate of you, Joseph.

JOEY: Dinah? Remember when you first came into the Howard Johnson's—it was right after Christmas.

DINAH: It was snowing, and the streets were empty and—well, peaceful. New York was beautiful.

JOEY: You—you opened my eyes to what's really going on in the world, Dinah. Before I met you, I thought everything this country did was right. Boy! What you told me about Joe McCarthy—

DINAH: McCarthy could very well be our next president, and we could become a fascist state.

JOEY: Uh—uh—promise me you won't laugh about what I'm going to tell you.

DINAH: I promise, Joseph.

JOEY: I, uh—started—started writing about six weeks ago—a novel, I think.

DINAH: That's wonderful!

JOEY: But I didn't finish high school.

DINAH: Jack London only finished grammar school, and *Call of the Wild* is an American classic.

JOEY: Gee, Dinah. I could listen to you all night, but I got to skedaddle.

(JOEY stands up. Starts for the door.)

DINAH: Not before you tell what your novel's about, Joseph.

(JOEY hesitates.)

DINAH: Please, Joseph?

JOEY: Uh—it's about—it starts with this kid who's in this Catholic orphanage, and—

DINAH: Is that kid you? (JOEY nods.) When do I get to read it?

(DINAH's phone rings. Lights up on ADRIAN, holding phone. JOEY sits.)

DINAH: Hello?

ADRIAN: Hello, Dinah. This is Adrian. Joey tells me you have the influenza. (Very cold.) Get well.

DINAH: Thank you, Adrian. Here's Joseph. (Hands phone to JOEY.)

JOEY: (Cold.) What, Adrian?

ADRIAN: Hi, hon. I don't mean to disturb you, but I thought it would be just fantabulous if you stopped at the deli and picked up some coleslaw on the way home—it would be scrumptious with the shrimp-salad sandwiches.

JOEY: Okay. Cole slaw.

ADRIAN: Uh, honey. I love you!

JOEY: (Awkward pause.) I'll be home in a little while. (Hangs up. Starts for the door.) Adrian wants me to pick up some coleslaw on the way home.

DINAH: The two of you—how did you meet?

JOEY: (Has opened the door. Closes it and turns around.) I used to hang out in a bar on the, uh—waterfront. I met Adrian there, so—so we ended up getting an apartment together.

DINAH: Where does he work?

JOEY: Adrian hasn't worked in over a year. He says nobody will hire him because he's sissy lookin'. (Pause.) Uh—Dinah, I want to get something straight. A lot of people think—well—just because I live with Adrian that—you know? It ain't true—we're pals—that's it.

DINAH: It's really none of my business.

JOEY: I feel sorry for him. Maybe I shouldn't tell you, but—back in Cincy where he's from? He's fourteen and his dad catches him playin' around with one of the other boys—kid stuff—so he beats him with his belt buckle to within an inch of his life. Then he takes him to juvenile hall—turns him over to this doctor who gives him hormone shots to cure him. Before he gets the shots he don't have hair on his body. Now his chest is covered with hair, and it's all over his back. He hates it!

DINAH: It's a story worthy of Mary Shelley.

JOEY: Who's she?

DINAH: She wrote *Frankenstein*.

JOEY: A woman?

DINAH: Women are not always what they appear to be, Joseph. (Grabs her middle. Doubles over in pain. Moans.) It's—it's nothing.

JOEY: You sure?

DINAH: (Still doubled over. Completely on the bed.) It's my time of the month.

JOEY: Your period?

DINAH: I get the cramps real bad. That's why it's called "the curse." That's why I—(Rocks back and forth, hardly able to stand the pain.) I—I—had an abortion.

JOEY: (Bent over her.) You what?

DINAH: I had an abortion. I had an abortion.

JOEY: But—but aren't they illegal?

DINAH: (Angry.) Tell that to Miss Bessie up in Harlem.

JOEY: You—you went up there? Ain't that dangerous for a girl all alone?

DINAH: She came down here, Joseph.

JOEY: What about the—the whachamacallit? Did it come out?

DINAH: (Still doubled over in pain.) The—the fetus. A few hours ago. (Suddenly sits up.) Thank God it's over.

JOEY: You want me to take you to a doctor?

DINAH: I talked to Miss Bessie just before you arrived. She told me I'll be fine. I trust her—she's done hundreds of abortions.

JOEY: But still, just to be safe—

DINAH: Miss Bessie is better than any doctor.

JOEY: If you say so. (Moves to door with the book. Stops. Turns around. Angry.) A classy gal like you—why did you have to lie to me about—? Jesus, Dinah!

DINAH: I—I was afraid—afraid you wouldn't come if I told you the truth. (Suddenly tender and sweet.) I was going to call a girlfriend, but then—you—you were always so sweet to me at Howard Johnson's. I feel—I feel safe around you.

JOEY: You do? Really?

DINAH: I shouldn't have lied—I—(Starts to cry.)

JOEY: Hey, take it easy!

DINAH: I'm feeling sorry for myself, Joey.

JOEY: Hey! You just called me Joey!

DINAH: It somehow seems wrong to call a grown man Joey.

JOEY: I like it when you call me Joey.

DINAH: Then I'll call you Joey.

(Lights down on JOEY and DINAH as the phone rings in JOEY and ADRIAN's apartment. Lights up as ADRIAN enters and picks up phone.)

ADRIAN: Hello, Joey, I—heavens to Betsy! Hi, Sis! It's the middle of the night. No—what—what on earth are you—you're not calling from Cincy? You're here? You must be joshing me. (Pause.) Oh, no—the brute. You poor dear—you must be—Dickie Willow is a no-good hoodlum—let me—let me think, Darlene. I could rush right down to the Greyhound, but—but it isn't safe for you to wait for me there. That place is literally crawling with dope fiends who smoke reefers. As soon as you hang up, rush out the front door—there will be zillions and zillions of taxis lined up. Take the first one in line and give the hackie this address—Fantabulous, my dear. I'm so excited, I—Bye, Darlene! (Hangs up, exits. Lights down.)

(Lights up on DINAH's room. There is a photo of a young man in an army uniform on end table.)

JOEY: Who's the G.I.?

DINAH: That's Joe Morris. One of my ex-so-called-boyfriends.

JOEY: Is he the guy who got you, uh—?

DINAH: He's the culprit.

JOEY: Is he stationed around here?

DINAH: He shipped out to Korea, uh—a little over two months ago.

JOEY: Uh—does he know about—you know?

DINAH: I've written him at least a dozen letters, but he hasn't answered any of them.

JOEY: Uh—maybe he didn't get any of them.

DINAH: I always seem to fall for the wrong guy. Do you know the first thing I did when I moved to New York? I stood in line all night so I could get into the Paramount Theater to hear Frank Sinatra sing. I'm embarrassed to tell you, but I had such a crush on Frankie that I changed my name to Nancy—the name of his wife. I changed it back when I turned twenty-one.

JOEY: It's hard for me to believe—Dinah Donnelly, a bobby-soxer, chasing after—what's he called—"The Voice"?

DINAH: Don't rub it in. I was a devout Catholic—I almost became a nun—I lived in this Catholic boarding house for young ladies. Well, I saved up my money and enrolled at Columbia, and—

JOEY: You went to college?

DINAH: Only two years—status-quo hooey, except for Professor Garfinkel. He was a Marxist-Leninist, and he opened my eyes to what this country is all about—that this country is run by the rich and the powerful. Did you know that the powers that be were delighted by the rise of Adolf Hitler?

JOEY: You got to be kidding!

DINAH: It's so—the atom bomb threat hanging over our heads, but worst of all the Rosenbergs. They—

JOEY: I heard their name, but—

DINAH: Julius and Ethel Rosenberg—convicted of giving atomic bomb secrets to Russia and sentenced to death in the electric chair. They were killed because they were Communists. For months before their execution, I was on a picket line at the United Nations. The night of the execution I was sick—I was home in bed with the radio on. There was a bulletin announcing that Ethel and Julius had been electrocuted. Right after the announcement there was a Pepsi commercial. "Pepsi-Cola hits the spot, twelve full ounces, that's a lot. Twice as much—" This—this country is going insane. I've got my passport for a quick getaway. Don't—don't mind me—I'm feeling blue.

JOEY: I'd feel blue if I lived in this dungeon.

DINAH: A houseplant couldn't live here. If only I had a large room with plenty of sunshine.

JOEY: I happen to know of a room for rent that's got tons of sunshine, Dinah. Cheap, too!

DINAH: Where, Joey, where?

JOEY: It's my apartment, Dinah.

DINAH: Your apartment? But—but you live with Adrian.

JOEY: I've got a spare room.

DINAH: But—but wouldn't Adrian object?

JOEY: With you paying rent, it would take a big load off both our shoulders. Hell, neither of us is working. I could move you in the morning. You don't have nothin' heavy except for your books. Adrian—

DINAH: Not so fast, Joey. You're making me—

JOEY: Look, you don't have to move in for good—just for a little while. What do you say?

DINAH: I'm exhausted. Let me sleep on it, Joey.

JOEY: Dinah, you shouldn't be alone after—you know—so I'm going to stay with you. I can sleep on the floor.

DINAH: Oh, Joey, that's very kind of you, but—

JOEY: No butts about it. What if you start bleeding or something?

DINAH: What about Adrian?

JOEY: He'll survive without me.

DINAH: Well—I do have another comforter here somewhere. I confess—no clean sheets. I haven't been to the launderette in God knows when. (Hands JOEY the comforter. Lights a cigarette, straightens up bed. Doesn't look as JOEY takes off his T-shirt and uses it to wipe under his arms.)

JOEY: Whew! It's hot in here.

(JOEY takes off his pants. As he spreads comforter, DINAH finally sees him in his shorts. She gets a shocked look on her face. He sits on comforter, props himself against the chair, picks up *Lie Down in Darkness*, and begins to read.)

DINAH: Goodnight, Joey.

JOEY: (As he continues to read.) Goodnight, Dinah. (Lights down.)

SCENE THREE

(Lights up on JOEY and ADRIAN's apartment. It is five in the morning—two hours since DARLENE called. However, ADRIAN has been sound asleep offstage. There is a frantic pounding on the front door.)

DARLENE: Open up, Kidsie! It's Darlene!

(ADRIAN is half asleep as he enters and moves toward the door.)

DARLENE: (Pounds on the door.) If you don't, I—will you—?

ADRIAN: Just a sec, hon. (Rushes to door. Starts to unlock it. Finally opens it.

DARLENE rushes in, carrying suitcase and make-up case. Rushes to middle of room and drops cases. DARLENE is dressed in the style of the Fifties; her tight clothes show off her voluptuous body.)

DARLENE: Lock the door, quick! (Rushes over and grabs ADRIAN, pulls him away from the door. Slams it shut, puts on the locks. Rushes into middle of room.) The police! Telephone the police!

ADRIAN: Calm down, honey bun, you—

DARLENE: (Going in two directions at once.) The telephone—where is it?

ADRIAN: Is someone—?

DARLENE: A giant! On the stairs! He was drinking a bottle of wine and he stunk to high heaven. He was sitting on the stairs, Kidsie. It was god-awful. Snot was running down his mouth and chin, and he licked it—he licked it with his tongue—ooooh!

ADRIAN: He wouldn't let you by?

DARLENE: I could hear his footsteps behind me. He—

ADRIAN: (Laughs.) This is the Bowery, sweetie pie! There are bums like him all over.

DARLENE: (Horried.) All over?

ADRIAN: Most of them are so drunk all you have to do is give them a shove and they fall over. Don't worry, toots! You're with your big brother!

DARLENE: Why—why did I ever leave Cincy?

ADRIAN: To be with your big brother, that's why.

DARLENE: Kidsie, everything here is so scary. It—

ADRIAN: Honey bun, aren't you happy to see your big brother? (DARLENE throws her arms around him. ADRIAN picks her up and twirls her around. Kisses her and gets lipstick on his mouth.) Yummy! I love the taste of lipstick. Let's see! (DARLENE twirls around for his inspection.) You are a vision of loveliness, my dear, although I must style your hair. Let's see—Hedy Lamarr in her prime.

DARLENE: Everyone tells me I look just like her.

ADRIAN: Sit and rest your tootsies!

DARLENE: It was pitch-black downstairs. I couldn't find the elevator.

ADRIAN: That's because we don't have one. This is a walk-up, Sis.

DARLENE: What's that?

ADRIAN: It means you have to walk up six flights. Welcome to our cold-water flat!

DARLENE: You don't have no hot water?

ADRIAN: We have hot water but no heat.

DARLENE: How can you live in this—slum?

ADRIAN: It's twenty dollars a month. You should have seen it when we moved in. Some old harridan lived here, and two dozen cats. It stunk to high heaven.

DARLENE: (Stands up. Inspecting the apartment.) You and Joey—you know how to fix things up.

ADRIAN: All he knows how to do is repair the plumbing. I had to train him to take out the garbage.

DARLENE: (Picks up teddy bear on the bureau.) It's Big Boy! Remember how we used to fight over him, Kidsie?

ADRIAN: We almost came to fisticuffs!

DARLENE: Whatever that is. Are you still looking up big words in the dictionary? (ADRIAN nods.) You're so smart. It's a shame you didn't finish grammar school.

ADRIAN: Mmmm. (Moves to fridge.) I'll get you a pink lemonade. (Pours a glass of lemonade and hands it to DARLENE.) So—so I want the unvarnished truth about you and Miss Willow Wand.

DARLENE: You mean Dickie?

ADRIAN: I don't mean Walter Winchell.

DARLENE: Well—you remember Bruce Watson—he was my steady in high school?

ADRIAN: Gorgeous! He made my teeth chatter.

DARLENE: He called me at work and told me that Dickie bought a gun and was going to shoot me dead.

ADRIAN: How you ever got mixed up with Miss Willow Wand in the first place is beyond me.

DARLENE: Dickie turned over a new leaf. He stopped drinking.

ADRIAN: How many black eyes has he given you, Sis?

DARLENE: He's been like a friendly Saint Bernard for the last month or so. He—

ADRIAN: What did you do to make Miss Willow Wand want to shoot you?

DARLENE: Maybe it was because I had coffee with Bruce.

ADRIAN: Is that all?

DARLENE: Would I lie to you, Kidsie?

ADRIAN: Yes, you would, sister dear.

DARLENE: You know how Bruce is with those dreamy eyes of his—

ADRIAN: You're just like me, you can't say no—

DARLENE: (Mouth quivering.) I've made such—such a mess. (Begins to cry. Sobs like a little girl. ADRIAN takes her in his arms. He starts to cry, too. They rock back and forth. She gets out a hankie. Wipes her eyes. Hands hankie to ADRIAN. He wipes his eyes.) Kidsie, I really miss you.

ADRIAN: Me, too, toots!

DARLENE: You're the only one.

ADRIAN: We're like peas in a pod! Twin sisters!

DARLENE: You and Joey? Is everything all right?

ADRIAN: (Gets up from love seat. Moves to kitchen table.) Joey's seeing this bohemian female who lives in a dungeon.

DARLENE: Joey's seeing a girl? I thought he—?

ADRIAN: He is queer, toots, but he's trying to prove something!

DARLENE: Prove what?

ADRIAN: It's that vicious hag of a mother of his—loony—she wanted a girl—his hair down to his shoulders—would you believe—in sausage curls. His dad called him "Shirley Temple." So—ever since then, Joey's been trying to prove how butch he is.

DARLENE: Uh—the girl he's seeing—what's she like?

ADRIAN: I've seen her a couple of times at Harriet Johnson's, and she's frumpy. And her hair—no imagination. I must admit—she does have beautiful skin.

DARLENE: Is he sleeping with her?

ADRIAN: He constantly tells me about these different girls he slept with before we met, but it doesn't add up. If there's one thing I know, Joey is not interested in girls.

DARLENE: Where did you meet him?

ADRIAN: (Bragging.) This bar in the Village. All these queens were drooling over him and buying him drinks. He was drunk out of his mind. I was sitting at the end of the bar, sipping a glass of wine, and he staggered over—bought me drinks until the bar closed. Those queens were green with envy when we left together.

DARLENE: Joey drinks a lot?

ADRIAN: Once we got this apartment he stopped drinking so much. Now he only goes out and gets drunk once in a while.

DARLENE: You really love him, don't you?

(ADRIAN is on the verge of tears.)

DARLENE: Oh, Kidsie, I—(Takes his hand.) Nice and warm.

ADRIAN: Cold heart. (Pause. Takes both of her hands.) Sis, you can stay here as long as you want to.

DARLENE: Joey won't mind?

ADRIAN: Of course not. You can have the spare room. When I finish decorating, it will be fantabulous! (Runs upstage to hope chest. Pulls out frilly pink curtains.)

DARLENE: Mom's curtains!

ADRIAN: My dowry! (Sniffs.) Mom put in plenty of mothballs.

DARLENE: They bring back such memories.

ADRIAN: Joey's going to be tickled to death to see you!

DARLENE: But he don't even know me!

ADRIAN: He knows all about you, sister dear.

DARLENE: (Aghast.) All about me?

ADRIAN: Not everything. However, I couldn't resist telling him about that gorgeous flatfoot who was going to give you a ticket for jaywalking, and how you took him into the telephone booth and—

DARLENE: (Puts her hand over ADRIAN's mouth.) Kidsie! (ADRIAN giggles.

DARLENE sits on love seat.) I—I don't have the do-re-mi to catch the bus home.

ADRIAN: Don't worry. Big brother will support you.

DARLENE: (Skeptical.) You got a job?

ADRIAN: Well—no—but—but there's this Whelan's down in the Village. I'm going down there early this morning!

DARLENE: Kidsie, you've been looking for a job forever!

ADRIAN: I know. When—when I look for a job—well—it takes me an hour to get up the nerve to talk to the manager. Last week—this manager—he looked at me like I was some creepy monster and asked me if I wanted to be a waitress. (Starts to cry.) So—so sometimes I don't have the nerve to look for a job—so I scrape up a few pennies I save on groceries and go to 42nd Street and sit through a double feature. (Really sobbing.) Sometimes I sit through it two times so I can forget everything. (DARLENE puts her arms around ADRIAN. She hugs and kisses him.) It's do or die! I'm going to be parked in front of Whelan's. As soon as it opens I'm going right in and apply for a job!

DARLENE: Good for you, Kidsie.

ADRIAN: (Takes her hand. Looks at her fingernails.) Fantabulous!

DARLENE: It's velvet vermilion.

ADRIAN: Sweetie, do my nails.

DARLENE: Same old Kidsie!

ADRIAN: What did you expect—John Wayne?

DARLENE: It's in my make-up case.

(ADRIAN gets make-up case. Opens it and gets the velvet vermilion. DARLENE starts putting nail polish on his fingernails.)

DARLENE: I should call Mom, but I don't want her to know I'm in New York City.

ADRIAN: Why not?

DARLENE: It's because of the Communist spies.

ADRIAN: Pardon me?

DARLENE: Mom says New York is full of Communist spies because of the United Nations. She says the Communist spies kill Americans.

ADRIAN: It's a big joke, toots. I wouldn't know a Red if I saw one.

DARLENE: How come it's in the headlines every day?

ADRIAN: It's too early to call Mom.

DARLENE: (Looks at watch.) Five-thirty. Mom gets up at five sharp.

ADRIAN: Five-thirty? You called me at three, Sis. That was over two hours ago. Where have you been?

DARLENE: I—well—waited for a taxi.

ADRIAN: For two whole hours?

DARLENE: When I finally got a taxi, the driver—he got lost.

ADRIAN: He couldn't find Houston and Second Avenue?

DARLENE: He turned off the meter and told me the ride was on him.

ADRIAN: The plot thickens.

DARLENE: He showed me Rockefeller Plaza, and then he drove up Park Avenue where all the rich people live.

ADRIAN: Sightseeing at three in the morning?

DARLENE: Well—we ended up parked under this great big bridge. He said it was the Will—something—

ADRIAN: (Very angry.) You parked under the Williamsburg Bridge with a strange man at four o'clock in the morning? It's a wonder he didn't slit your throat.

DARLENE: He was a gentleman. He called me "ma'am." His name is Rocco, and he comes from Red Hook.

ADRIAN: Red Hook is one of the toughest sections of Brooklyn!

DARLENE: He sort of looks like Cornel Wilde.

ADRIAN: Muscles and curly hair? Hmmm—he sounds like heaven. (Jerks his hand away from DARLENE.) But if you want to end up as a gun moll for some gangster from Red Hook—

DARLENE: Give me your thumb.

ADRIAN: (Reluctantly giving her his hand.) Did he screw you?

DARLENE: (Very upset.) Kidsie, don't talk like that!

ADRIAN: Did he?

DARLENE: Of course he didn't! (DARLENE looks away. ADRIAN tries to catch her eye. Their eyes finally meet.) Well—he did take it out of his pants.

ADRIAN: This is like pulling teeth.

DARLENE: He made me touch it.

ADRIAN: I hope you didn't give him a blow job!

DARLENE: (Aghast. Beside herself.) How could you—?

ADRIAN: Darlene, this is your big brother!

DARLENE: I barely touched it, and—it squirted all over—all over my brand-new nylons!

ADRIAN: I wondered why your legs are bare.

DARLENE: They're the only pair I got.

ADRIAN: Give them to me. I'll wash them out in Lux.

DARLENE: (Finishes painting his thumbnail.) All done.

ADRIAN: (Holds up painted nails.) Maria Montez? Yvonne De Carlo? (DARLENE stretches and yawns.) It's time to hit the hay!

DARLENE: (Lies back on the love seat.) What time does Joey get up?

ADRIAN: I'm afraid he's spending the night with that female!

DARLENE: Will Joey know who I am when he gets in?

ADRIAN: I'll wait up for him, Sis.

(ADRIAN carefully pulls sheet over DARLENE, making sure he doesn't smear the hand with the nail polish on it. Then he gets the "Big Boy" teddy bear, winds it up, and gives it to DARLENE. She hugs it. We hear the tinkle of the teddy bear. Lights slowly dim.)

SCENE FOUR

(Noon the same day. As the lights come up we hear ADRIAN singing offstage.

DARLENE is asleep on the couch. DARLENE's nylons hang over sink.)

ADRIAN: "Jeepers! Creepers! Where'd you get those peepers! Jeepers! Creepers! Where'd you get those eyes?" (Bustles into living room with lamp.) It devastates me to throw you away, my lovely. (Throws the lamp into the trash.)

(DARLENE wakes up. Sits up. ADRIAN quickly pours her a cup of coffee.)

DARLENE: Where's Joey?

ADRIAN: With that female, where else? (Exits. Returns with robe for DARLENE and white shirt for his job interview.)

DARLENE: What did you say her name was?

ADRIAN: (As he folds DARLENE's sheet and hands her the robe.) Dinah, and she's got Joey wrapped around her little finger. She preaches all this Commie garbage, but she don't fool me. Underneath it all she's like every other female, looking for her knight in shining armor.

DARLENE: You're letting the green monster get the best of you.

ADRIAN: For all I know, they could be at City Hall getting a marriage license.

DARLENE: (Exits to bedroom with robe.) Stop torturing yourself, Kidsie.

ADRIAN: When he was on one of his drunken binges, he told me what he wanted more than anything else was a wife and kids!

DARLENE: Do you think Dinah can change him?

ADRIAN: Every girl thinks she can change a guy. Remember Louise back home?

DARLENE: How could I forget big, fat Louise?

ADRIAN: She thought she could change this nellie queen, Sis. Screwing Louise made me realize how queer I really am!

DARLENE: (Re-enters. Crosses to ADRIAN.) What? You and Louise? You never told me.

ADRIAN: I didn't want to ruin my reputation. Let me tell you, Sis. Well—last night—Joey talked about when he was a little boy—he talked about his mom and then he was hugging and kissing me and I never felt so close to him, and guess what? That—that female called! She's a witch. She knew exactly when to call. I know she wants to marry him, even though she's old enough to be his mother.

DARLENE: She's old enough to be his mother?

ADRIAN: She's the spitting image of Thelma Ritter. (Moves into spare room, which is in darkness.) I leafed through House and Garden after you went to sleep. I'm going to strip the wall to show off the natural brick, and I'll use the pink curtains. It will be absolutely stunning.

DARLENE: Aghhhh! (Runs toward the front door.) A creepy crawly! A creepy crawly!

ADRIAN: It's only a cockroach, toots! (Takes off slipper and swats the cockroach.)

DARLENE: You got cock-a-roaches?

ADRIAN: This is Manhattan, sweetie. Did you know there are literally swarms of cockroaches in the restrooms of the United Nations?

DARLENE: I'm going back to Cincy.

ADRIAN: If you do, I'm off to Copenhagen.

DARLENE: Is that in New Jersey?

ADRIAN: It's where Christine Jorgensen got her sex change.

DARLENE: You—you want to get it—? (Looks at his groin.)

ADRIAN: If I thought Joey loved pussy, I'd do it.

DARLENE: Adrian, don't talk like that.

ADRIAN: Just kidding about getting it cut off.

(The telephone rings.)

ADRIAN: (Rushes to answer phone.) Joey, I was going to call the police—what? (With hand over phone.) It's that hackie!

DARLENE: (Eagerly grabs phone. Her attitude is very Marilyn Monroe.) Hi, Rocco! Long time no see.—Radio City Music Hall?—A movie with Lana Turner? It's all news to me. (Hand over phone.) He wants me to go to the movies with him!

ADRIAN: Since he didn't attack you, it's okay.

DARLENE: My big brother says it's okey-dokey. What time tonight? Right now? (Hand over phone again.) He's calling from a pay phone on the corner!

ADRIAN: I'll get you ready in a jiffy.

DARLENE: Don't come up. I'll be down in—(Looks at ADRIAN.)

ADRIAN: Five minutes.

DARLENE: Five minutes.

(DARLENE sits in chair. ADRIAN grabs nylons from over sink. Opens her suitcase and gets garters.)

ADRIAN: You'll adore the Rockettes. They're a chorus line of high-kicking dolls who do precision dancing.

(DARLENE holds up her leg. ADRIAN straddles her leg, puts one nylon stocking on her, then the garter. ADRIAN has handed the other nylon to DARLENE, who is bunching it up. She hands it to ADRIAN.)

DARLENE: They're still a little damp.

ADRIAN: Be more careful this time. (Puts the other nylon on her, then the garter. Rummages through her suitcase.) Ta-da! (Holds up sexy black dress.) Frederick's of Hollywood couldn't do any better!

DARLENE: (Moves toward bedroom, which is in darkness.) My step-ins.

ADRIAN: You're going à la Marilyn Monroe.

DARLENE: She don't wear nothing underneath?

ADRIAN: Not a stitch—according to Hedda Hopper!

DARLENE: (Goes through door into bedroom. Of course, it is dark and we can't see her. ADRIAN is standing in doorway.) No peeking!

(ADRIAN sings "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" as he gets Kleenex. He poses with Kleenex in each hand as he waits for DARLENE to enter. On the line, "These rocks don't lose their shape," ADRIAN hands the Kleenex to DARLENE and she stuffs them in her bra. She sits down. ADRIAN goes to work on her hair. He gives her bobby pins as she hands them back to him one at a time. While he is doing this, she is singing, "I'm Just a Little Girl from Little Rock." While she is singing this song, he also puts lipstick on her mouth. She tries to sing while he is doing this. When he finishes, he gets another Kleenex and presses it against her lips so the excess lipstick will come off.)

DARLENE: Shoes, Kidsie, shoes!

ADRIAN: (Holding up shoes.) Three-inch spikes! (Kneels and puts them on her.)

DARLENE: What purse should I take?

ADRIAN: The one with the rubbers in it.

DARLENE: Oh, Kidsie!

ADRIAN: A girl has to protect herself. (Hands her the glittery purse. DARLENE opens it. ADRIAN dumps contents of old purse into the glittery purse. Mostly condoms. ADRIAN rushes to the chest of drawers and gets earrings.) They're Inca—very Yma Sumac. (Puts them on her.) Stand up and walk around. (DARLENE does her sexy walk.) Fantabulous! And, Sis, keep your legs crossed. You better skedaddle before Mr. Gorgeous picks up one of the Bowery bums. They give great blow jobs. (Rushes to the door—unlocks it—opens it—DARLENE exits.) Trip the light fantastic! (Starts to close the door and then stops. Shouts.) Ask Rocco if he owns his own cab!

(ADRIAN closes the door, locks it. Picks up things that are scattered around the room, puts them away. The white shirt is draped over the love seat with a tie from the Fifties. Takes off his robe. He is wearing a T-shirt that hides his hairy chest. Puts on shirt, grabs the tie. Closes his eyes for a moment. He is facing the fourth wall, deadly serious.)

Good afternoon, sir! I'd like to apply for the position of counterman! (Stops. Shakes his head. Tries to be butch.) Good afternoon, sir. Yeah—uh—I worked at this truck stop on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Uh—I've been married for—(Losing conviction.) ten years and I got me three kids. I—(Shakes his head as the lights slowly dim.)

(Song: "The Melody Lingers On.")

SCENE FIVE

(An hour later. The stage is empty. JOEY pushes the door open with his foot. Enters out of breath, carrying two big cardboard cartons. Goes into bedroom, which is in darkness.)

JOEY: Adrian! I'm home.

(ADRIAN enters from bathroom. Sees front door open. Goes to door, looks out as JOEY enters from bedroom.)

JOEY: Hi, babe!

ADRIAN: (As he closes and locks the front door.) I almost forgot what you look like.

JOEY: (Takes off T-shirt. Wipes under arms with it. Throws it on the love seat.) I was going to call you—

ADRIAN: You spent the night with her.

JOEY: Jesus, it ain't what you think.

ADRIAN: You fucked her!

JOEY: I went to sleep on the floor, for cryin' out loud!

ADRIAN: I wasn't born yesterday.

JOEY: Oh, brother! You're acting like you're my wife.

ADRIAN: (Has exited with JOEY's T-shirt. Re-enters.) Darlene's in from Cincy.

JOEY: Darlene?

ADRIAN: My baby sister.

JOEY: You got to be kidding.

ADRIAN: Her boyfriend was chasing her with a gun, so she came running to me.

JOEY: She's here?

ADRIAN: She went to Radio City Music Hall with a—a friend.

JOEY: Goddammit! Shit and crap!

ADRIAN: There's nothing to worry about, silly. You'll adore her. I'm in the process of fixing up the spare room for her, and—

JOEY: Jesus, Adrian. I already rented the spare room to Dinah!

ADRIAN: (Utter shock.) You did—what?

JOEY: (Opens door to spare room.) Some of Dinah's stuff.

ADRIAN: (Really furious.) First you stay out all night, and then you rent a room in our apartment to—to that female! (Grabs jacket and puts it on.) As soon as I get a position, I'm moving out so the two of you can live happily ever after. (Rushes to door and opens it. JOEY chases him, closes door.)

JOEY: Adrian, it's been over a year since you paid your share of the rent.

ADRIAN: And you remind me of it every day. Joey, you have such a convenient memory. This apartment—do you remember what a dump it was when we moved in? There was tons of garbage, and I set rat traps everywhere. I scraped off the moldy wallpaper—I sanded the floors—ten hours a day for months. I worked as hard as you did at Harriet Johnson's and you know it!

JOEY: Stop playing the martyr, for cryin' out loud.

ADRIAN: You said you wanted a home more than anything else in the world. I've given you that home. (Tears in his eyes.) This is the thanks I get?

JOEY: (Takes bills from pocket. Slams them down on kitchen table.) Twenty bucks—from Dinah Donnelly! Ten bucks a month to rent the spare room.

ADRIAN: She'll be here for two whole months?

JOEY: Adrian, we are flat busted. Seventy-five cents to our name after we pay the rent. You better get some dough from your sister for groceries.

ADRIAN: Well, hon, she had to leave Cincy in such a hurry—

JOEY: Oh, brother! This is getting worser and worser. (Puts out cigarette.) Uh—there's something—maybe I shouldn't tell you but, uh—when Dinah called last night and she said she had the influenza?

ADRIAN: She was lying, wasn't she?

JOEY: Babe, she had an abortion.

ADRIAN: (Taken aback.) You're joshing me. (JOEY shakes his head.) Heavens to Betsy! I feel like an idiot. How is she doing?

JOEY: She's doing okay.

ADRIAN: Was it done by a medical doctor?

JOEY: A colored lady from Harlem.

ADRIAN: Dear me—just like Darlene. A colored lady from Covington.

JOEY: Darlene had an abortion?

ADRIAN: When she was fourteen—she was four and a half months gone. The colored lady—she stuck a catheter in Darlene—it was inside her for twenty-four hours. The baby was—fully formed—it even had fingernails. I—I didn't know what to do with it—it was dead, so—in the toilet—in the toilet! (Crying.) I—I tried to flush it down but it wouldn't go down, so—so I put it in a jar and I put the jar in a paper bag and I threw it in the Ohio River. I—

(JOEY sits on love seat with ADRIAN, presses his face against ADRIAN's face, their foreheads touching. This is a moment of real intimacy.)

JOEY: Take it easy, baby.

ADRIAN: I feel so—so—so guilty!

JOEY: You were helping your sister, for cryin' out loud.

(JOEY and ADRIAN finally pull away from each other.)

ADRIAN: Dinah can have the spare room, honey.

JOEY: But—but what about your sister?

ADRIAN: She can sleep on the couch.

JOEY: You're okey-dokey, babe.

ADRIAN: I do have these fantabulous pink curtains that will—

JOEY: Ah, Adrian? (Moves to him. Takes his hand.) Do me a favor. Don't call me "honey" around Dinah.

ADRIAN: She doesn't know about us?

JOEY: I, uh—never talked about it. (Pulls ADRIAN close. Kisses him.) Oh, babe!

ADRIAN: Honey, I've got to go—go to Whelan's for that job.

(JOEY kisses ADRIAN on the neck, feels his buttocks.)

JOEY: I want some of that ass.

ADRIAN: What about Dinah. Isn't she—?

JOEY: She can wait in the hall.

ADRIAN: Will you say that again?

JOEY: Jesus! Come on, babe!

ADRIAN: Oh, honey! I love you so much. I love you so much. I—

JOEY: (Sticks his tongue down ADRIAN's throat.) Will you shut the fuck up?

(As the lights slowly dim, ADRIAN kisses JOEY's chest and stomach as he lowers himself to his knees. Song: "Kiss of Fire.")

ACT II

SCENE ONE

(A day later. Now we have DINAH's bedroom instead of the basement room. The pipes are gone; we have a window. It is very bright, with a plant. A single bed. A Bloomingdale's shopping bag. ADRIAN's pink curtains are on the window.

As the scene opens, DINAH is making her bed. JOEY rushes in eagerly through the front door, carrying a milk crate. Dashes into DINAH's room. Hands DINAH the milk crate.)

DINAH: Perfect for my end table. (Places the milk crate next to the door and puts a colorful scarf over it. Picks up the Bloomingdale's shopping bag.) These pots and pans. Do you think Adrian—?

JOEY: I don't see why not. (Quickly takes the bag full of pots and pans to the kitchen and puts them on the floor—rushes back into DINAH's room. DINAH puts photo of Joe Morris on end table. JOEY points to photo.) What did you say his name was—your G.I. Joe?

DINAH: Joe Morris. I must go to the post office to change my address.

JOEY: (Rushes out of her room toward the front door.) I'll get the card for you. You fill it out and I'll take it back to the post office.

DINAH: It's not necessary, Joey. I feel fine.

JOEY: But it's only been a couple of days since—since, you know?

DINAH: (Decisive. Dismissing the abortion.) Thank God that nightmare is over and done with. (JOEY sees Vengeance is Mine on her bed.)

JOEY: You—reading Mickey Spillane? I can't believe it!

DINAH: Adrian gave it to me. I didn't have the heart to tell him it's trash.

JOEY: Have you read it?

DINAH: I've thumbed through it. (Opens it. Makes fun of it as she reads.) "I killed more people tonight than I have fingers on my hands. I shot them in cold blood and enjoyed every minute of it. I pumped slugs in the nastiest bunch of bastards you ever saw. They were Commies. They were Red sons-of-bitches who should have died long ago." (Frowns.) Today it's the Commies—yesterday it was the Japanese.

JOEY: Uh—Dinah? What do you think of your new room?

DINAH: Adrian did a wonderful job. It's so bright and cheerful.

JOEY: What about the curtains? You like them?

DINAH: Well—pink? That shade of pink is not my favorite color.

(Without hesitation, JOEY takes down the curtains.)

DINAH: Adrian—he'll be upset. He—

JOEY: No, he won't. I know him a lot better than you do.

DINAH: Joey, I don't feel right about this. Adrian will—

JOEY: I want your room to be exactly the way you want it.

(ADRIAN enters through the front door, dressed in coat and slacks.)

ADRIAN: Joey? Darlene?

JOEY: (Enters from spare room.) I'm helping Dinah fix up her room.

ADRIAN: So where's my baby sister, Joey?

JOEY: She am-scrayed outta here with that hackie—what's his name?

ADRIAN: Rocco.

JOEY: She told me to tell you she's spending the night with him.

ADRIAN: I still haven't met him. I hope he's not like Miss Willow Wand!

JOEY: Any luck at Whelan's?

ADRIAN: 'Fraid not. However, I scooted up to the Upper East Side and the Olde Weston on Madison, looking for a job as a bellhop. Joey, the people who live at the Olde Weston are so rich they actually look poor. But—Scottie Herman—he does all the hiring. Well—Scottie Herman didn't fool me for a second—she's as queer as a three-dollar bill. She was dropping hairpins like there is no tomorrow. Can you imagine, she actually asked me if I ever went to the Astor Bar—the notorious Astor Bar?

JOEY: You know I hate it when you call a guy "she"!

ADRIAN: (Near DINAH's room.) Well—he—(Moves closer to DINAH's room.) he—he informed me that one of the bellhops has been calling in sick every other day, and if he does it again—(Claps his hand together.) I get the job!

JOEY: I'll keep my fingers crossed for you. (Points to the shopping bag.) Some pots and pans from Dinah—for you.

ADRIAN: (Takes out a frying pan and inspects it.) It's as filthy as sin! Shameful!

JOEY: How can a pot be shameful?

ADRIAN: All this muck—there's no telling what's been in them. (Throws the frying pan back into the shopping bag with a loud crash.)

JOEY: Jesus, do you have to be so fuckin' dramatic?

(ADRIAN turns away.)

JOEY: Look, Adrian. I'm going back to work in a day or two—then as soon as I get a paycheck—then I'll help Dinah find a nice room of her own.

ADRIAN: Oh, honey! (Throws his arm around JOEY and kisses him. JOEY pushes him away as DINAH enters, carrying a book—a slim volume.)

DINAH: I hope I'm not intruding. I—

JOEY: (Has moved far away from ADRIAN.) Uh—what you got there?

DINAH: My favorite poet—Arthur Rimbaud.

JOEY: (Snaps his fingers.) A Season in Hell!

DINAH: Very good, Joey. Listen to this: "I ought to have a special hell for my anger, a hell for my pride—and a hell for sex; a whole symphony of hells."

ADRIAN: (Has lighted a cigarette. It's in the holder. Takes a puff.) That's me. A symphony of hells.

JOEY: (Ignoring ADRIAN.) That's terrific!

DINAH: I'm afraid it's the story of my life. Just a second. (Hurries to her room and returns with the large photo of Albert Einstein.)

ADRIAN: Ah—Grandma Moses!

JOEY: It's Albert Einstein!

ADRIAN: I know who it is.

DINAH: I thought you might like it. Doesn't he have a sensitive face?

JOEY: Gee, thanks, Dinah. (Takes photo.) Adrian, you got a frame somewhere?

ADRIAN: Oh, well. (Takes photo from JOEY. Crosses room and picks up picture frame with photo of Greer Garson. Talks to the photo.) I just adored you in Mrs. Miniver with Walter Pidgeon, but—(Takes her picture out of the frame and inserts Einstein.) So—so—avant-garde!

DINAH: (Moving toward front door.) I'm off to the post office.

JOEY: There might be a bum in the hallway. I—

DINAH: They don't frighten me. They're victims of a dog-eat-dog economic system. It's so sad to see such degradation—I can see the pain in their eyes. (Exits, but leaves door open.)

ADRIAN: (Laughing as he closes door and locks it.) What she needs is a soapbox in Union Square.

JOEY: It's true what she says—you know? What we need is—(Sits on love seat reading *A Season in Hell*.)

ADRIAN: (Crosses behind him.) What I need is a long bubble bath. (Runs his hand up JOEY's arm.) Would you like to join me, honey?

(JOEY pulls away from ADRIAN's touch. ADRIAN shrugs, picks up the Bloomingdale's shopping bag, goes into DINAH's room. Slams down the shopping bag. Sees the curtains on the end table in a mess. Looks up at the bare window. Stands motionless as the lights slowly dim. Song: "Pretend.")

SCENE TWO

(Three weeks later—early afternoon. Lights up. Empty stage. There is a banging on the front door. ADRIAN enters from his bedroom wearing a frilly apron.)

ADRIAN: Hold your horses. I'm coming, toots. (Opens the door. DARLENE rushes in, slams the door.) Another Bowery bum on your tushie?

DARLENE: I can't figure out how Dinah can live here with all these icky bums.

ADRIAN: She's turning them into Commies. (Hugs and kisses DARLENE.) You're a sight for sore eyes.

DARLENE: Where's Dinah and Joey?

ADRIAN: Can you believe—she's got Joey going to a lecture on Marxism.

DARLENE: What's that?

ADRIAN: It's on how to become a Red spy. Tomorrow he's taking her to the Polo Grounds for a double-header.

DARLENE: Joey likes polo?

ADRIAN: (Inspects DARLENE's nails.) They're dreadfully chipped. You don't want to end up a dumpy housewife from New Jersey, do you? I have your favorite—velvet vermilion.

DARLENE: I can only stay for a minute or two.

ADRIAN: All the way from Hoboken, and you can only stay for—?

DARLENE: I'm the new super for our apartment building. (Looks at watch.) I got to be back in Hoboken to meet the landlady in an hour.

ADRIAN: You came all the way from Hoboken to spend a minute or two with me?

DARLENE: Oh, Kidsie, a little longer than that.

ADRIAN: I don't know why you had to move all the way out to Hoboken with an authentic idiot like Rocco!

DARLENE: He's going back to school.

ADRIAN: He's going to finish grammar school?

DARLENE: He's going to City College, silly.

ADRIAN: Oh, no! You're going to support him?

DARLENE: He's driving a cab on weekends, and me—I'm the new super—it sort of comes even.

(ADRIAN lights another cigarette.)

DARLENE: (Takes the cigarette out of his mouth, puffs on it and puts it out in ashtray.) My God, you've turned into a chain smoker.

ADRIAN: Sis, I know you didn't come all the way from Hoboken to tell me I'm a chain smoker. Quit stalling and tell your big brother why you rushed over here.

DARLENE: Kidsie, come out and visit us. You can have your own room. I'm all alone, what with Rocco in school all day. We got a big back yard with flowers and birds that sing. You're more than welcome to stay through the fall and winter! Even longer!

ADRIAN: You want me to leave Joey in the clutches of that witch?

DARLENE: You won't have to get a job—ever!

ADRIAN: Sister dear, I'm beginning to smell a rather large dead rat, and it stinks to high heaven. It's Dinah! She put you up to this.

DARLENE: Dinah ain't like that. She's a straight shooter.

ADRIAN: Then—then it was Joey!

DARLENE: Joey?

ADRIAN: Yes, Joey!

DARLENE: All he said was—it would be sort of nice if you come out to visit me and Rocco. He only said it when he seen we got an extra bedroom.

ADRIAN: Joey saw your extra bedroom? (Panic sets in.) Oh, no! He's been all the way to Hoboken. He wouldn't go there for nothing.

DARLENE: He wanted to see our new apartment—that's all.

ADRIAN: Was Dinah with him? (DARLENE shakes her head.) What about Rocco?

DARLENE: He was there.

ADRIAN: (Really angry.) I can just see the three of you. "What are we going to do with the queer freak? Let's lock him up in the attic and throw away the key."

DARLENE: Kidsie! It was nothing like that.

ADRIAN: Did Joey tell you and Rocco that he's sick and tired of supporting this swishy queen?

DARLENE: Stop torturing yourself.

ADRIAN: (Blowing his lid.) How could you—you of all people? You're the only one I ever trusted. You let Joey talk you into this. Everybody—everybody's ashamed of Kidsie. If I was a butch queen like Joey everyone would ignore it—they'd pretend I'm not queer. (Rushes over to mirror.) Hair—hair all over my chest and back, and—and what do I see? A nellie gorilla! (Moves to front door. Opens it.) Now, sister dear, go back to suburbia where you came from!

DARLENE: (Crying as she leaves.) Oh, Kidsie, I—

ADRIAN: (Locks door behind DARLENE.) A job—any job—even washing dishes. I've got to—

(The lights slowly dim. Song: "Till I Waltz Again.")

SCENE THREE

(A month later—a chilly day in September. A woman's coat is draped over DINAH's bed. JOEY is typing furiously on his Underwood, talking to himself—papers are scattered all over. A cigarette dangles from his mouth. An ashtray is full of butts.)

JOEY: "He couldn't help but ponder"—ponder? (Shakes his head and corrects it.) "He couldn't help but wonder. Even though her smile was angelic the thousands of wrinkles on her face were like a road map to hell." (Confusion.) Jesus, where do I put the comma? (DINAH enters the front door—her first appearance in make-up and high heels, etc.)

JOEY: The stairs get you?

DINAH: Don't stop writing on account of me.

JOEY: (Stands and stretches.) I been at it for six hours. So how's the new job?

DINAH: I type itineraries all day for bourgeois ladies going to the Bahamas, but let me tell you what happened on the way home. Would you believe—Joe McCarthy—in the flesh—in Columbus Circle? He kept waving all these documents and shouting that the government is swarming with Communists! I wish it was true. (Takes off high heels and puts them on chair.) Where's Adrian?

JOEY: Adrian? I dunno.

DINAH: He goes around with his nose in the air.

JOEY: I still can't figure out how come he made such a big stink over those goddam pink curtains. Jesus!

DINAH: I should have insisted on keeping them up.

JOEY: I told him I was the one who took them down.

DINAH: Joey, I think it's for the best if I move out.

JOEY: I'm fed up with his shenanigans. If he don't get a job by the end of the month, I'm going to tell him to move out. (Changing subject.) Early tomorrow morning it's down to Chambers Street to one of those crummy employment agencies.

DINAH: Back to restaurant work?

JOEY: Counterman—soda jerk—anything but busboy. (Suddenly happy.) Dinah, I'm going to save up my tips—put 'em in a jar and don't touch 'em for six months. Then I quit my job and write full-time for as long as my money holds out. I might even end up writing the Great American Novel—who knows?

DINAH: That's the spirit, Joey. As for me—my dream isn't much, but—well—to be a reporter for a paper like the National Guardian or the Socialist Daily—papers that tell the truth about what is going on in the world.

JOEY: They all turned you down, huh?

DINAH: Well, uh—

JOEY: You mean you didn't try? Gee! Dinah, a girl like you—you're as smart as can be. I bet they would hire you right way.

DINAH: I don't think they hire women.

JOEY: Why not? You can type and everything.

DINAH: I must say—I'm sick and tired of that dumb travel agency already. (Big smile.) You talked me into it. All they can do is turn me down. (Pause.) Let's go for a walk along the East River.

JOEY: Okey-dokey!

DINAH: I'll get a sweater and some comfortable shoes. (Goes into her room, where she sees the red coat draped over her bed.) What on earth?

JOEY: (Crosses, stands in doorway.) It's Darlene's.

DINAH: It looks like the coat in the window at Bloomingdale's.

JOEY: What are you talking about?

DINAH: I can't remember how many times I pointed it out to you, Joey. (Looks at the label.) Lord and Taylor? I can't imagine Darlene shopping there.

JOEY: (Takes coat from her.) Try it on, Dinah.

DINAH: I don't—

JOEY: C'mon. (Helps her into it.)

DINAH: (Admiring herself in mirror on fourth wall.) It's—it's beautiful.

JOEY: It's yours, Dinah.

DINAH: Joey, don't tease me.

JOEY: It's a September Christmas present, Dinah!

DINAH: You know you don't have any money.

JOEY: I sold a pint of blood.

DINAH: You did what?

JOEY: There's a blood bank on 42nd Street. Five bucks.

DINAH: But—but this coat, it's a fifty-dollar coat!

JOEY: Four-fifty down on Orchard Street. It ain't brand new.

DINAH: (Runs her hand over the coat in awe.) But—but selling your blood. Oh, Joey, it's so—so sweet of you. (Intimate.) Ever since you rescued me—well—

JOEY: (Hesitant.) What, Dinah?

DINAH: You don't treat me like most men do. Most men—they're only interested in—

JOEY: Shhhh—

(JOEY leans forward and kisses DINAH on the mouth. It is tentative—his body is away from her. DINAH takes off the coat and puts it on a hanger. All of this is done very slowly. Then she moves to him. She puts her arms around him and kisses him. As they slowly move toward the bed, she pulls up his T-shirt and he begins to unbutton her blouse. She lies on the bed and he gets on top of her.)

ADRIAN enters quietly by the front door. He is wearing a bright red bellhop uniform with a pillbox hat. He is flushed and excited. He hurries into his bedroom. JOEY has DINAH's skirt up, and is pulling at her panties. ADRIAN frowns as he picks up DINAH's shoes from the chair and moves toward her room. He stands in the doorway. He sees them making love on the bed. He is frozen for a moment, then slowly moves backward. He is in shock.

JOEY and DINAH continue to make love as the lights slowly dim. Song: "Hey, There!")

ACT III

SCENE ONE

(Two weeks later. ADRIAN is standing at kitchen sink, facing away from the audience. He is shaving his chest. We see shaving cream on his right shoulder.)

ADRIAN: (Singing.) "Mairzy doats and dozy doats and liddle lamzy divey, a kiddley divey too, wouldn't you?" (Finishes shaving his chest, gets a towel and wipes it, including the shaving cream on his shoulder. Turns around, and we see that he

has no hair on his chest. Crosses to telephone and sits staring at it.) I've just got to—(Picks up phone and hastily puts it back.) Courage, Camille! (Finally dials.) Hi, Darlene! Yeah, it's me! I didn't mean a word of all those absolutely horrid things I said to you. I'm such a sap, Sis—what? What did you say? There's nothing to forgive? Oh, sweetie, you're the only real friend I have in this big, cold world. I—I love you, Darlene. (Pause.) Oh, I have this fantabulous news! Believe it or not, this nellie queen's got a job—at last!—The Olde Weston on Lexington Avenue. It's a hotel—very snobbish. I'm a bellhop, hon. You know, "Call for Philip Morris!"—I'm not fibbing. If you don't believe me, call the Olde Weston and ask for Scottie—Scottie Herman. He's chief bellhop and he hired me, and—guess what? He's gay and he's crazy about me!—No, not that way. He's old enough to be my father—well—my mother! I've only known him for a couple of weeks, but it feels like I've known him all my life. He's introduced me to all his friends: actors, chorus boys, ballet dancers, Sis! It's all very exciting—how big are the tips? Mostly dimes and quarters but I did get a four-bit tip from Mr. Allenworth in the Penthouse. I should call him Miss Allenworth because there's a trail of fantabulously gorgeous men visiting his penthouse every night.—What? Miss Allenworth is short and stubby and walks like a penguin. Darling, she's more obvious than I am, if that's possible! Let me tell you about her hair—I said hair, Darlene, H-A-I-R. Well, every time I've seen Miss Allenworth in the lobby, her hair is plastered down on her head. I think she uses axle grease. Yesterday when I went up to her penthouse to deliver her mail, I noticed her hair was curly—no axle grease. I mentioned it to Scottie. Scottie told me that Miss Allenworth puts all that axle grease on her hair to straighten it out, so nobody will know she's gay. Can you imagine? Do you think if I put axle grease on my hair nobody will think I'm gay?—Oh, Sis, I'm being funny. (Now very serious.) Guess what? I looked at an apartment in the Village yesterday.—No—I don't have enough moolah to move out—not yet. That evil bitch—she's got her clammy claws in Joey, and she's not going to let go. I saw it with my own eyes, Sis—they were screwing like there was no tomorrow. She thinks he's going to marry her, and he goes strutting around like he's Marlon Brando—what? What? You got to pee? Cross your legs—just teasing! Bye.

(ADRIAN sees DINAH's red coat and her blouse lying over back of couch.)

ADRIAN: Miss Slobola never puts anything away. (Picks up red coat, looks at label.) Lord and Taylor? I must say—Dinah is a traitor to the working class. (Puts on coat, puts his hands on his hips and struts across the stage like a Fifties model. The phone rings. Picks it up.) Hello, Sis—oh—who? Who? Not—not really? Is this the war hero from Korea? The Joe Morris? You're where? Fort Dix in Jersey? This is—is fantabulous news—for Dinah. No, she's not here right now, but she should be home any sec—who, me? Dinah and me? Heavens—strictly platonic.—It means we're friends—pals. Oh, I've seen your photograph. Dinah is a very lucky lady. You are so—well—you're gorgeous! Oh, Dinah keeps your photograph next to her bed, and she talks about you all the time.—Of course, she doesn't have a steady. She's waiting for you with open, uh—uh—arms. Who, me? Adrian—Adrian Ross. Give me your phone number, and—you don't have one? You'll call back later? Promise? Now don't forget. Dinah will be

waiting with bated breath. Bye! (Hangs up. Shouts.) G.I. Joe Morris is back and Dinah's got him—I hope! (Puts his hand into pocket of DINAH's coat, which he is still wearing.) What is—? (Pulls out lipstick. Goes to mirror and puts some on. Licks his lips.) Yummy!—More like Elsa Lanchester in *The Bride of Frankenstein*.

(We hear DINAH and JOEY's offstage laughter. ADRIAN hurriedly takes off coat, puts it on couch, and exits. JOEY and DINAH burst through the front door. DINAH is holding a Kewpie doll.)

DINAH: My heart's still in my throat from the parachute jump!

JOEY: You don't think Coney Island is a capitalist trap to steal money from the working class?

DINAH: Of course I do. But I still had a wonderful time.

JOEY: Dinah, I've never heard you laugh so much—you know, I hope it's more than your new job—

DINAH: If you hadn't encouraged me—(JOEY grabs her and pulls her close just as ADRIAN enters. JOEY pulls away. Goes to his desk and sits.)

ADRIAN: Hi, Dinah. Was the Museum of Natural History a fantabulous thrill?

DINAH: Joey took me to Coney Island instead.

ADRIAN: Me oh my! What is this? (Looks at Kewpie doll.) Did big strong Joey knock over all the milk bottles and win Miss Kewpie Doll for you?

DINAH: I knocked them down myself.

ADRIAN: I'm sure you did, my dear.

JOEY: (Sees lipstick on ADRIAN.) Jesus, Adrian—your mouth.

ADRIAN: (Puts hand to mouth.) Oooops! (Gets Kleenex and wipes off lipstick.)

JOEY: You're never going to grow up, are you?

ADRIAN: I hope not. (Smiles at DINAH.) If you don't mind a smidgeon of advice, dear, why don't you try a shade of lipstick that's more vivacious?

DINAH: I only wear it at work—where it's mandatory.

ADRIAN: Hmmm. If only you'd let me do something with your hair.

DINAH: I wear it short to keep it out of my eyes.

ADRIAN: (Moves to couch, runs his hand over DINAH's coat.) Wool jersey—so—so luxurious. I absolutely adore the dolman sleeves.

DINAH: You like it?

ADRIAN: Fashionable—I'm positive I saw it in Vogue.

DINAH: It's a classic.

ADRIAN: (Looks at label.) But Lord and Taylor, my dear? Wouldn't you say they're, uh—part of the ruling class?

JOEY: It's from Orchard Street, Adrian.

ADRIAN: Please, Joey. This coat is much too elegant to—

JOEY: I got it from a street vendor on Orchard Street. Four bucks plus change.

ADRIAN: You—you bought it for her?

JOEY: I didn't buy it for the man in the moon.

ADRIAN: What's the auspicious occasion, her birthday?

DINAH: My birthday's next month—the tenth.

ADRIAN: Well, I'll bake you an upside-down cake.

DINAH: You don't have to bother, Adrian.

ADRIAN: No bother at all, dear. How many candles—forty?

DINAH: I'll be thirty-five.

ADRIAN: Oooops—so sorry! Oh, Joey? I made a pot of stew from a special recipe from House and Garden—all you have to do is heat it up. I know how Dinah hates to cook.

JOEY: We had hot dogs with sauerkraut at Coney Island. I'm full. How about you, Dinah?

DINAH: Ditto.

JOEY: But this is a special occasion—and we're going to Roseland to celebrate it. Guess what? Dinah's going to work for *The Socialist Daily*!

ADRIAN: Congratulations but—I better get ready for the revolution!

DINAH: It's really not much. I start in the mail room at thirty-five dollars a week, but then—if it works out, I'll get writing assignments.

ADRIAN: Wouldn't it be dreadful if they sent you to Outer Mongolia?

JOEY: Any hot water, Adrian?

ADRIAN: Oodles and oodles.

(JOEY exits to bedroom. ADRIAN rushes over to DINAH.)

ADRIAN: Dinah, I thought it would be for the best if I was mum in front of Joey—you know how he gets. However, I have some fantabulous news for you. Your knight in shining armor is back in town.

DINAH: My knight in shining—?

ADRIAN: Your G.I. with the delicious Southern accent.

DINAH: Joe—Joe Morris is back from Korea?

ADRIAN: He's at Fort, uh—the one in Jersey?

DINAH: Fort Dix.

ADRIAN: That's it—"dicks." How could I forget that word?

DINAH: Thank God. I hope he isn't wounded.

ADRIAN: He didn't sound wounded. He sounded hot to trot!

DINAH: Where's his phone number, Adrian. I—

ADRIAN: He was calling from a pay phone. He said he'd call back later.

DINAH: He better call back or I'll murder him in cold blood.

ADRIAN: I can't say that I blame you, uh—considering what he, uh—uh—(Puts his hand over his mouth. Jumps up. Goes to mirror and starts combing his hair.)

DINAH: Considering what he—what, Adrian?

ADRIAN: Oh—nothing—nothing—really!

DINAH: Joey told you.

ADRIAN: Told me?

DINAH: About my abortion.

ADRIAN: About your—?

DINAH: It's perfectly all right. I'm not ashamed of it.

ADRIAN: Well—Dinah. I helped Darlene when she had an abortion, and I know how devastating they can be. I—I really did feel sorry for you when you first moved in. But—Dinah—you—you—

DINAH: What is it, Adrian?

ADRIAN: (Looks at watch.) Mercy. I'll be late for work!

DINAH: Will you finish what you started to say?

ADRIAN: I really wasn't, uh—

DINAH: Please, Adrian?

ADRIAN: Dear me, I—

DINAH: I know you're angry at me, so—will you please—?

ADRIAN: I—I—well—okay, Dinah. I—I welcomed you—welcomed you into my home with open arms, didn't I?

DINAH: You were sweet when I first moved in.

ADRIAN: I spent oodles of time fixing—fixing up your room. Dinah, I had my own sweet sister sleeping on the love seat to accommodate you. So—what thanks do I get? You—you took down the beautiful pink curtains that Mom gave me. I know that may sound silly to you, but—

DINAH: Adrian, Joey took them down.

ADRIAN: Why on earth would Joey do something like that?

DINAH: Well—they did clash with my madras bedspread, and—well—I told Joey. But I begged him not to take them down. He wouldn't listen to me.

ADRIAN: A likely story. I'll wager you're going to tell me you didn't scheme with Joey to get Darlene to talk me into moving out to Hoboken so you could have him all to yourself!

DINAH: I don't want Joey all to myself, and I didn't have anything to do with it!

ADRIAN: Please, my dear. Ever since you went into Harriet Johnson's and sat on Joey's station for hour after hour, I knew what you were up to!

DINAH: What was I up to?

ADRIAN: Don't pull the naïve act. You're too old for it.

DINAH: Adrian, you've got me all wrong. You—

ADRIAN: Then that corny routine from that subterranean crypt of yours. (Imitates her.) "Oh, Joey, dear. I've got the influenza—would you mind bringing me a pack of Pall Malls, as I'm having a nicotine fit?" I mean—how gauche can you get?

DINAH: I was lonely and frightened, and I told Joey I was lying about the cigarettes. I—

ADRIAN: Then the coup de grâce. Your high-heeled pumps were—(Points.) I picked them up to take them to your room. Of course, you left the door conveniently ajar so I could see you and Joey. I—

DINAH: What—what are you saying?

ADRIAN: Oh, you're good. Very good. Worthy of Eve Harrington!

DINAH: What are you—?

ADRIAN: To be blunt about it, Joey was screwing you. You know, the old in-and-out?

DINAH: Oh my God, you saw—? I should have closed the door.

ADRIAN: Should have closed the door? You did it deliberately to let me know that Joey belongs to you.

DINAH: Joey doesn't belong to me. He's my friend.

ADRIAN: Really? Do you go around fucking your friends?

DINAH: Adrian, I didn't know that you and Joey were—well—

ADRIAN: Please drop the naïve ingénue routine.

DINAH: Joey told me that the two of you are pals.

ADRIAN: (Frustrated and very angry.) Dinah, when are you going to stop burying your nose in one of your esoteric books and see what's going on in the real world? Do you really—do you really believe I made a home for Joey because I'm his pal? Do you think I wash his dirty shorts and darn his socks because—oh, Dinah!

JOEY: (Offstage.) The towels, Adrian!

ADRIAN: The what? (Goes to chest of drawers and gets towel. JOEY enters, wet from the shower, wearing shorts. ADRIAN's attitude changes. Very seductive for DINAH's benefit.) Here we go, sweetie pie!

JOEY: (Pulls away. Threatening.) What did you call me?

ADRIAN: "Sweetie pie," sweetie pie!

JOEY: (Trying to make light of it. To DINAH.) He's a real card. Always kidding, you know?

ADRIAN: Well, I'm off to the salt mines. Joey, honey, do I get a great big smooch before I go—a great big wet one? (Puckers up his lips and closes his eyes.)

JOEY: Jesus, Adrian! C'mon!

ADRIAN: C'mon, where? The bedroom for a quickie?

JOEY: Cut the fuckin' shit, goddammit!

ADRIAN: (Really enjoying himself.) Oh, I have a fantabulous idea. How 'bout a bit of two-penny upright, as the English say?

JOEY: One more word—you're getting a fat lip.

ADRIAN: You wouldn't strike this nellie queen, would you? (JOEY clenches his fist, ready to hit ADRIAN.) I guess you would. (ADRIAN rushes to the front door.) I love it when you get angry. You're so—so butch!

JOEY: You're a real prick!

ADRIAN: No one ever called me that before. (JOEY rushes toward the front door, ready to hit ADRIAN.) Bye-bye, sweetie pie! (ADRIAN quickly exits. An awkward silence.)

JOEY: Dinah? Uh—Adrian and me—all we are is pals, you know?

DINAH: Yes—you told me.

JOEY: Uh—I guess I did. Uh—you don't believe all that crap that Adrian, uh—do you?

DINAH: Joey, it doesn't really matter. (Goes into her room. JOEY stands in the doorway of her room.)

JOEY: It matters to me, Dinah. Okay—okay. (Comes into her room, still in his shorts.) I—I might as well tell you the truth. Me and Adrian—well—we did fool around when we first moved in here. Dinah, it was only kid stuff, and that was the end of it. But, uh—ever since then he's—well, he acts like he's my fuckin' wife, you know? When it gets right down to it, he don't know what's real and what isn't. I think it's because of the movies he goes to—he thinks he's in one. Do you know, Dinah, before I quit my job he spent almost every day at a 42nd Street movie watching double features over and over. Then he comes home and tells me he spent the day looking for a job. I give you one guess where he gets the money for the movies—it's from my pants pocket when I'm asleep—that's where!

DINAH: Please, Joey. That's between you and Adrian.

JOEY: I felt like busting him one on the chops, but he's so—so damned helpless that—

DINAH: (Really upset, frustrated.) All this—this constant friction—I'm afraid it's because I'm living here.

JOEY: Dinah, Adrian ain't gonna be livin' here much longer!

DINAH: Think twice before you ask Adrian to leave. You're upset right now.

JOEY: This place is perfect for the two of us, Dinah.

DINAH: Now, Joey, hold on.

JOEY: (Sits on bed next to her.) I got a confession to make. When we made love—well—it was the first time I ever—with a girl.

DINAH: I'm surprised—you were very sure of yourself.

JOEY: You thought I was sure of myself?

DINAH: It was—well—tender.

JOEY: It was much more than that for me, Dinah. I wish I could explain—just being with you—just walking down the street with you, holding hands. Do you remember the first time we kissed? It was on the subway going to the Polo Grounds to see Willie Mays play center field. I see this couple—in their fifties—they smile at us when they see us kissing. I can tell they're thinking we're young and in love. It made me feel—well—it was like my soul was scrubbed clean of all the filth—all the shit of my life. (Pause.) Dinah, I've been thinking. How 'bout the two of us taking off and starting all over again? Get out of this apartment—leave this stinkin' town and everything it stands for. Heck, we

could go to L.A. We could hitchhike—it's easy getting rides on Route 66. Maybe we could even stop in Las Vegas and get hitched.

DINAH: Did you say—?

JOEY: Married, Dinah. What do you say?

DINAH: Joey, my head's whirling. First you say you want to hitchhike all across the country, and—

JOEY: (Getting more and more frantic.) You want me to get down on my knees and propose?

DINAH: No, I don't want you to get down on your knees—

JOEY: (Kisses her passionately. DINAH tries to pull away.) I love you—I love you— (Feeling her breasts.) if you only knew how much I love you!

DINAH: Joey, take it easy!

JOEY: See what I got for you? (Grabs her hand and puts it between his legs.)

DINAH: Joey—this is—

JOEY: (Pushes her down on the bed. Pulls down his shorts and gets on top of her.) I love you—I love you! (Jerks up her dress, pulls at her panties. Up and down on her.)

DINAH: Get the hell off me, goddammit! (Manages to push him off her. JOEY falls on the floor.)

JOEY: (Shocked, disoriented.) What's the matter with you?

DINAH: What's the matter with me? You hurt me—you bastard!

JOEY: I hurt you?

DINAH: What on earth got into you? What—?

(The phone rings. JOEY rushes over and grabs the phone.)

JOEY: (Into phone.) Hello?—No, this ain't Adrian.—Yeah—yeah, she's here. (Holds out phone. DINAH hesitates, afraid, but then she takes it.) Your war hero from Korea.

DINAH: (Takes the phone.) Hi, Joe. (Pause.) Oh—nothing—nothing's wrong.

(Trying not to cry as she rubs her shoulder. JOEY is standing in the doorway, listening to her with his arms folded, still in his shorts.) It's, uh—just a frog in my throat, Joe. (Coughs.) There! What? (Pause.) All the time I was under the impression that—I should've known better, Joe. I'm sorry—what? That's wonderful. Where we used to meet? Under the clock in the lobby of the Astor Hotel? Eight o'clock. I can hardly wait. (Hangs up.)

JOEY: There goes our date to Roseland. Boy, have I been a sucker. I asked you to marry me, but all you want is the sad sack who knocked you up and then won't even pay for your abortion!

DINAH: He didn't know about it. He only got my letters this morning.

JOEY: You believe his bullshit?

DINAH: It's not bullshit.

JOEY: The great big war hero is back and you're drooling.

DINAH: You have the nerve to talk to me like this, after—after what you did to me?

JOEY: What? What did I do to you?

DINAH: You tried to rape me!

JOEY: I tried to what?

DINAH: Rape me, Joseph. You tried to rape me.

JOEY: Holy cow! I barely touched you, for cryin' out loud!

DINAH: I'll be black and blue for weeks.

JOEY: Shit, nobody's that delicate.

DINAH: (Blows her stack.) Only women, Joseph! Women are different from men—or didn't you notice?

JOEY: Why don't you—come right out and say it—say that Joey Jurovich is a queer?

DINAH: When it gets right down to it, I don't really care.

JOEY: You screw every Tom, Dick, and Harry, and then you tell me I tried to rape you?

DINAH: Oh my God, not you, too. Like all the others. You—

JOEY: You ain't no virgin, that's for sure.

(DINAH rushes into her room, followed by JOEY. DINAH grabs her suitcase from under the bed. JOEY grabs picture of Joe Morris and throws it into her suitcase.)

JOEY: Don't forget your big war hero!

DINAH: Talking to you is like talking to some Neanderthal.

JOEY: The great big intellectual, huh? (Grabs milk crate full of books and dumps them into her suitcase.) So fuckin' high and mighty. When you gonna get off your fuckin' high horse?

DINAH: (Shuts suitcase. Moves into front room.) Nothing—nothing but filth coming out of your mouth.

JOEY: (Gets between her and the door. In her face.) When all is said and done, you're a lousy piece of ass. An old and ugly piece of ass.

DINAH: You—you son of a bitch! (Slaps him hard across the face. JOEY is stunned, taken aback. DINAH grabs her suitcase and rushes out the door.) Help me—somebody!

JOEY: (Grabs her purse and throws it out the door. Screaming.) He ain't gonna marry you—you fuckin' cunt—nothing but a fuckin' cunt—you're nothing—(Turns away.)

(Quick blackout. Song: Nat "King" Cole—"Lush Life.")

SCENE TWO

(The next day. Offstage voices.)

DARLENE: I was out with Wanda last night, Kidsie, and—

ADRIAN: Is she the one you gave the Toni Home Permanent to?

DARLENE: That was Emma Lou.

(ADRIAN enters warily through the front door, looks around. He is carrying a large, empty suitcase. DARLENE is carrying a smaller suitcase. Both of them tiptoe in.)

ADRIAN: (A whisper.) Keep your fingers crossed that Joey isn't home. You check Dinah's room. (ADRIAN exits to bedroom. DARLENE crosses to DINAH's room. A quick look and then back into front room.)

DARLENE: Ain't nobody in her room.

ADRIAN: I absolutely abhor confrontations. (Points to chest of drawers.) You get the bottom two drawers. (DARLENE takes the small suitcase and moves to chest of drawers.) A note for Joey—(Goes to desk, gets paper and writes.)

DARLENE: About Wanda.

ADRIAN: Wanda?

DARLENE: Wanda Walensky, my wall-eyed girlfriend. She's got five kids, no husband, and she's knocked up again. We was at this Chinese restaurant. Wanda opened her fortune cookie and a cock-a-roach popped out!

ADRIAN: Maybe she's going to marry a cockroach!

DARLENE: Oh, Kidsie!

ADRIAN: (Finishes writing note.) This should do it.

DARLENE: You should think twice before moving out.

ADRIAN: Sister dear, that's all I've been thinking about.

DARLENE: Joey might beat you up for leaving him.

ADRIAN: Joey's not like one of your violent boyfriends.

DARLENE: Rocco ain't violent. I guess I shouldn't tell you, but—well—Rocco proposed to me.

ADRIAN: He didn't.

DARLENE: Did too. I'm not supposed to tell you!

ADRIAN: (Grabs her hands. They jump up and down in celebration.) I'm so happy for you—so happy!

DARLENE: I'm going to be a June bride. But mum's the word until Rocco tells you.

ADRIAN: I want to be a bridesmaid.

(They freeze as the front door opens. JOEY enters. He has a half pint of whiskey sticking out of his back pocket. Obviously has been drinking. DARLENE and ADRIAN look frightened.)

ADRIAN: Hi, Joey.

JOEY: I talked to Rocco downstairs. He tells me you're moving out.

ADRIAN: I called before but you weren't home, Joey.

JOEY: Yeah—I was out.

ADRIAN: I didn't come home last night. I stayed with Darlene and Rocco.

JOEY: Dinah's gone.

ADRIAN: She's what?

JOEY: She moved out—last night. See for yourself.

(As ADRIAN goes into DINAH's room, JOEY pulls out the half pint of whiskey and takes a swig. Quickly returns it to his back pocket. ADRIAN comes back into room.)

ADRIAN: Sis, why didn't you tell me—?

DARLENE: You only asked me about Joey.

JOEY: Adrian? I want to talk to you alone.

ADRIAN: (Very nervous.) Uh—I work the early shift today—

JOEY: Only for five—ten minutes. (Moves toward ADRIAN. DARLENE quickly gets between them.)

DARLENE: Joey, we told Rocco we'd be right down.

ADRIAN: It's okey-doke, Sis!

DARLENE: Well—(Hesitates, then grabs suitcase and heads for door. JOEY blocks her, grabs suitcase.)

JOEY: I'll bring it down, Darlene.

(DARLENE gives ADRIAN a hopeless look and finally exits. JOEY gets a chair and puts it in front of the door. Sits on it, blocking the door.)

JOEY: So Rocco tells me you rented a room.

ADRIAN: (From across the room.) It's a hole in the wall—a glorified closet.

JOEY: You paid the rent already?

ADRIAN: For a week. Oh, hon, uh—Joey, let me tell you—(Forced joviality. Sits on love seat.) Guess who checked into the Olde Weston this morning? None other than Myrna Loy—*the* Myrna Loy! I took a telegram up to her suite! I was hoping she would ask me to take Asta for a walk, but then I realized that Asta isn't a real dog—it's only a movie dog. She gave me a—

JOEY: Can you cook there?

ADRIAN: Can I what?

JOEY: Can you cook in your room? I know you—you'll go bats without a kitchen.

ADRIAN: It's temporary. If you must know, Scottie told me—

JOEY: Scottie?

ADRIAN: Scottie Herman, my boss at the Olde Weston who hired me. Well, he happens to know this gay landlord who owns this tenement under the Third Avenue Elevated. He told Scottie I'm welcome to the first apartment that's available.

JOEY: You want to live under the Third Avenue El with all that noise at night?

ADRIAN: (Now very animated and excited.) No one sleeps there at night, Joey. Almost everyone is a chorus boy, a singer, or an actor. I already met this one actor who played Mitch in a touring company of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Guess what? He's out of work and he's waiting on tables at the Brass Rail!

JOEY: Did you hit the sack with him?

ADRIAN: Heavens no! He's really old—must be pushing thirty.

JOEY: Uh—babe? Doncha know? I never wanted you out of here.

ADRIAN: Please, Joey. You asked Rocco and Darlene to take me off your hands.

JOEY: I guess I wasn't thinking right. I just lost my job. I—

ADRIAN: I was humiliated beyond belief.

JOEY: Adrian, I didn't—didn't mean to—you know?

ADRIAN: No, I don't know.

JOEY: Didn't mean to hurt your feelings.

ADRIAN: Well, it's water under the bridge. (Takes out wallet. Removes five-dollar bill. Puts it down on table.) Here's five. I'll give you five every Friday until I've paid you every red cent I owe you.

JOEY: Hey, babe. I got a better deal! (Rushes across room. Takes the five-dollar bill and shoves it in ADRIAN's pocket.) You don't owe me a dime and you don't move out. What do you say?

ADRIAN: I don't think so.

JOEY: Jesus, Adrian. Dinah's gone. What more do you want?

ADRIAN: What more do I want? If you don't know the answer to—

JOEY: Let me tell you what happened with Dinah. We were getting ready to go to Roseland when that G.I. from Korea calls—what's his name?

ADRIAN: Joe—Joe Morris.

JOEY: So guess what Dinah does? She stands me up to go out with that jerk. To top it off she wears the coat I bought her. Well, I couldn't take it anymore, Adrian. I told her to pack her things and get the hell out of here.

ADRIAN: You did that?

JOEY: You're darn tootin' I did. I took me awhile to figure out what she wants—she wants some asshole she can wrap around her little finger!

ADRIAN: Well, I'm not going to say I told you so.

JOEY: You were right, babe. Uh—you know something? (Takes ADRIAN's hand.) You're the only one who really understands me. Didja know I'm nuts about you? (Puts his arms around ADRIAN.)

ADRIAN: You never said that before.

JOEY: I'm saying it now.

ADRIAN: Yes—yes you are.

JOEY: (Starts to kiss ADRIAN. ADRIAN backs off.) I really care for you, babe!

ADRIAN: That's nice, but—but do you more than care for me?

JOEY: Huh?

ADRIAN: Do you love me, Joey?

JOEY: You know I do. (Pulls ADRIAN close. Gives him a passionate kiss. Really goes at it. His hand moves to ADRIAN's buttocks.) I ain't been in there in I don't know how long!

ADRIAN: (Tries to pull away from JOEY.) Please—please—

JOEY: Something wrong?

ADRIAN: Nothing—nothing—just—(Tries to pull away, but JOEY won't let him go.)

JOEY: Do I have to rape you, for cryin' out loud? (Whirls ADRIAN around. Presses against him. Grabs ADRIAN's hand and puts it on his groin.) It's for you, babe!

ADRIAN: Oh my God!

JOEY: We're gonna do it on the kitchen table!

ADRIAN: On the kitchen table? (JOEY picks ADRIAN up in his arms and carries him to the kitchen table, starts to unbuckle ADRIAN's pants. ADRIAN jerks away from JOEY, runs across the room.) You got me so—so discombobulated that—well—Darlene and Rocco are downstairs waiting. I've—

JOEY: Let them wait, babe—(Rushes across room. Now he unbuckles ADRIAN's pants. Starts to pull them down.) I want some of that ass right now.

ADRIAN: But Joey, I—

JOEY: You know me. It only takes me a few minutes to come.

ADRIAN: Honey, I want more than a few minutes with you.

JOEY: So okay. I'll run downstairs and tell them you changed your mind.

ADRIAN: That I did what?

JOEY: Changed your mind. (Rushes to door.) I'll be back in a jiffy! (Opens door.)

ADRIAN: Joey, hold your horses!

JOEY: What?

ADRIAN: Just—just because I'm still in love with you doesn't mean—oh, dear.

JOEY: What, Adrian?

ADRIAN: Heavens to Betsy! You're—you're trying—trying to seduce me into staying here with you!

JOEY: (Has moved back into room.) I'm trying to what?

ADRIAN: You took it for granted that all you had to do was give me a royal screwing, and—and that would be the end of my moving out.

JOEY: You got it all wrong, Adrian.

ADRIAN: Oh, Joey, how could you—how could you do such a thing?

JOEY: Do what?

ADRIAN: You know what! (Pause.) I—I need a cigarette. (Lights cigarette.) If you only knew how many times I wanted to tell you that I—I never had the nerve before—

JOEY: What the fuck you talking about?

ADRIAN: It's about Harriet Johnson's. I presume—I take it you haven't the faintest notion of why I stopped coming in there to see you?

JOEY: Yeah, I know why. It's because I stopped giving you money that you used to go to the movies on 42nd Street!

ADRIAN: Oh, Joey, what I really wanted—I wanted to sit on your station and talk to you.

JOEY: What the fuck stopped you?

ADRIAN: You made it perfectly clear I wasn't welcome.

JOEY: How in hell did I do that?

ADRIAN: Stop it, Joey. Dinah—she would sit on your station for hours and hours. When you came home that's all you ever talked about—what a fabulous person she was—what a genius—how she was teaching you what life is all about—on and on, ad nauseam.

JOEY: I learned a lot from her and you know it. She—

ADRIAN: Joey, you were embarrassed by me. Some of the waiters at Harriet Johnson's might find out that the incredibly butch Joey Jurovich was living with a nellie queen.

JOEY: Boy! What an imagination you got!

ADRIAN: It's quite obvious you're ashamed of me.

JOEY: I'm ashamed of you?

ADRIAN: And—you're ashamed of yourself, too, Joey!

JOEY: (Shocked.) I'm ashamed?

ADRIAN: Yes, you're ashamed of being queer.

JOEY: Me? Ashamed of being queer?

ADRIAN: You heard me correctly.

JOEY: What—what makes you think I'm queer?

ADRIAN: Pardon me?

JOEY: You know fuckin' well I don't suck cock—that all I am is trade. And—I don't take it up the ass, either!

ADRIAN: (Rushes over to desk. Grabs dictionary, pounds it with his fist.) The definition of homosexuality is "sexual activity with someone of the same sex."

JOEY: So you're telling me that all the guys who get blow jobs are queer, huh? Jesus, Adrian, you take the cake!

(ADRIAN grabs large suitcase and moves to chest of drawers. He puts in teddy bear and his radio.)

JOEY: (Rushes across room. Right in ADRIAN's face.) I just figured it out! It's that Scottie guy at the hotel. He's fucking you!

ADRIAN: For your information, Scottie and I are friends. Going to bed with Scottie would be like going to bed with Darlene. We'd end up giggling.

(The telephone rings. JOEY waits for ADRIAN to pick it up, but ADRIAN continues packing.)

JOEY: (Picks up phone.) Hello? (Hands it to ADRIAN.)

ADRIAN: I'll be down in a sec, Sis. Uh—what? (He hangs up. He rushes to the chest of drawers and gets a bottle of nail polish. Holds it up.) Velvet vermilion—I promised I'd do Darlene's nails. (Snaps shut suitcase. Picks up both suitcases. Moves quickly toward the door. Hand on doorknob.)

JOEY: Babe? Now that Dinah's gone we got two bedrooms—what if—well—you could have your own bedroom.

ADRIAN: I don't—I'm afraid not, Joey.

JOEY: You're sure?

ADRIAN: Yes—yes I am.

JOEY: (Sudden anger.) Then—then I ain't gonna stay here by myself. (Pulls out half pint. Takes a swig.) Hell, the only reason I got this apartment in the first place was on account of you, babe. (Pause.) I'm takin' off. There ain't no reason for me to hang around this crummy town!

ADRIAN: Where—where would you go?

JOEY: I dunno—California—maybe.

ADRIAN: Heavens! You can't go very far when you're broke.

JOEY: I got my thumb, babe. When all is said and done—this town—nothing but bad luck. Bright and early tomorrow morning it's down to the Holland Tunnel—I stick out my thumb and head west.

ADRIAN: Promise you'll write as soon as you get settled?

JOEY: I promise, babe. (Pause.) You're welcome to this apartment.

ADRIAN: It's very sweet of you, but—it has too many memories. I've got to start fresh. After all, I'm going to be twenty-eight years old in Jan—

JOEY: You told me you were twenty-six.

ADRIAN: I did?

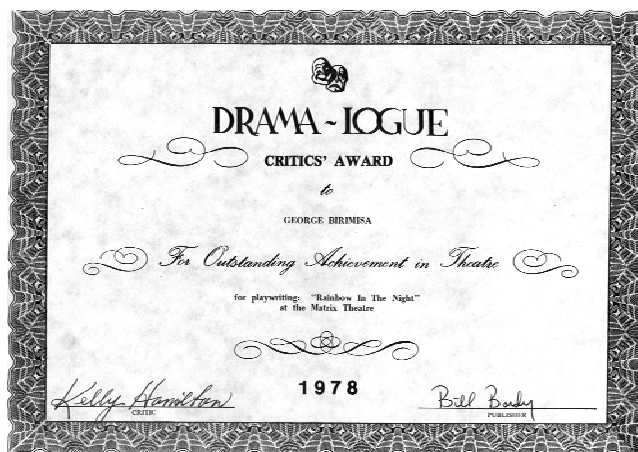
JOEY: Yeah, you did!

ADRIAN: Well, I guess nobody's perfect. (Pause.) Darlene and Rocco are waiting. I—
(Picks up suitcases. JOEY has crossed stage away from ADRIAN, with his back to him. ADRIAN puts down suitcases and crosses to JOEY.) Joey, honey, it's not you. I've—I've got to find out—(Kisses the back of JOEY's neck. Grabs both suitcases under one arm like an experienced bellhop and exits.)

(After a moment JOEY turns and looks at the closed door. Slowly gets his cigarettes and bottle, then sees the note in the typewriter. Sits on love seat and reads the note. He starts to shake. Then he pulls his knees up in fear. His whole body is shaking. Song: "Promise You'll Write.")

CURTAIN

["Chiquita Banana," lyrics by Garth Montgomery, music by Len MacKenzie © 1945 Shawnee Press, Inc., "Qué Será, Será (Whatever Will Be, Will Be)," lyrics by Ray Evans, music by Jay Livingston © renewed 1983 Jay Livingston Music, Inc. and St. Angelo Music, Inc., "Jeepers Creepers," lyrics by Harold Arlen, music by Harry Warren © 1938.]



THE BACK ROW OF THE STRAND

(1985)

A Monologue

CHARACTER:

MIKE, a man of about thirty-nine years of age with a magnificent, muscular body. He sports a tattoo of a black panther on his left biceps.

THE SET:

MIKE's apartment. Leather cap and motorcycle jacket, black boots, T-shirts all over the place. *Drummer*, Folsom, Christopher Street magazines scattered on the floor.

THE TIME: 1980.

(MIKE is standing in front of an invisible mirror that is squarely on the apron of the stage. He is naked. As the play opens, he is doing alternate curls with two 50-pound dumbbells.)

MIKE: Seven—uh—eight—uh—nine—and, uh—dammit—ten! (Drops weights to the floor.) Whew! Son of a—(Frowns at himself in the mirror.) Not bad for an old fart! (Strikes the classic double-biceps pose, arms raised over his head.) The geriatric Arnold Schwarzenegger! I'll bet my biceps are pushing eighteen inches! Let's see how—(Grabs a T-shirt that says "49ers" on the front, puts it on, checks himself out in the mirror.) Fuck! It doesn't show off my biceps! (Takes off T-shirt, throws it on the floor. Grabs a pair of blue jeans from the shelf, pulls them on, checks himself out in the mirror. Takes off the blue jeans. Grabs another T-shirt. The phone rings. MIKE picks it up.) Hello? Oh, hi, Rick! Hold on a second, will you? (Puts down the phone, puts on the T-shirt, picks up the phone. As he talks to "Rick," he absent-mindedly caresses his body and strokes his penis.) Hiya, Rick. So how are you? Tell me—how was L.A.? (Pause.) That bad, huh? What? Yeah, I'd like to go for coffee, but I'm on my way out the door to guess where? (Laughs.) The back row at the Strand. You've never been there, Rick? You don't know what you're missing. (Moves downstage and inspects himself in the invisible mirror.) You want to hear about the last time I was there? Yeah, it was last week.

(Sitting in chair.) There's only one place to sit at the Strand if you want some real hard action. It's the back row of the second balcony. Okay, Rick? I'm up there—I take off my leather jacket so anyone who is interested can get a good look at

my body. I put my feet over the seat in front of me and spread my legs wide—invitingly. Once my eyes adjust to the dark, I see this young guy sitting three seats away from me. His eyes are glued to my crotch. I look away, pretending I could care less, but I reach down and give my dick a quick squeeze. I continue to ignore the guy as I stare at the opening credits of Andy Warhol's *Trash*, and then, presto!—there it is—the magical ass of Joe Dallesandro. I mean, Rick, this beautiful ass is twelve feet high and I don't know how wide—but it's the most gorgeous ass I've ever seen in my life—even if it does have two pimples on the right cheek.

I look away from the screen—this young guy is staring at my crotch—he gets up—he plops down in the seat next to me. I look at him out of the corner of my eye. He's maybe in his middle twenties—skinny but good-looking. Then—I feel his hand on my leg. Well, let me tell you, Rick, if there's one thing that turns me on, it's a hand on my leg in a public place. It happened to me once on the subway in New York, and I shot off in my pants—I don't know what it is—but it drives me wild! Well, the skinny guy's hand moves nice and slow—it inches its way to my crotch. His hand presses down on my cock—he squeezes. Then I feel his fingers moving upward—now he fumbles with my zipper. He's having a hard time unzipping my fly, but I don't help him—part of the game is for me to ignore him. Finally, he unzips me and reaches inside my pants. Of course, I don't wear shorts, so he can take it out nice and easy. He takes a deep breath—he looks around, and then he bends over—his head is in my lap. A moment later, he's going to town.

All this time, I'm watching the movie, right? I don't know if you can call it art imitating life or life imitating art—but anyway, this naked gal is going down on Joe. It's amazing—it's happening right up there on the old silver screen and it's also happening right down here in the old back row. I mean—it's wild. And, hell, who is going to have an orgasm first—me or Little Joe? Well, let me tell you, it was no contest. Put me in a public place, and slam! bam!—ten seconds flat and I shoot. After I come, the skinny guy rests his head on my lap. Finally, he sits up. I quickly zip up my fly. I lean over and whisper in his ear, "Thanks a lot, it was great."

"You're welcome," he says as he begins to stroke my right arm. Up on the screen, Dallesandro still hasn't shot his load. Now the girl is performing a sexy dance for our anti-hero—she is trying to arouse him—it doesn't help. Dallesandro is naked and you can see he's still very limp. You bored, Rick? (Pause.) You're not? Good! You know, it's funny. Usually, when I get a blow job from a stranger, he gets up as soon as he finishes and leaves. But not this skinny dude. He scrunches down in his seat—he's jerking his dong. "Do you work out?" he asks me. I want to tell him I'm a construction worker or a truck driver, but I'm not sure he'll believe me, so I say, "Yeah, I work out once in a while!"

He grins from ear to ear. "I knew you worked out from looking at your arm. It's so beautiful—like a sculpture!" He kisses my arm. Then he begins to lick my biceps. He runs his tongue from my triceps to my shoulder. He's moaning and groaning and pulling harder and harder on his dick. You see, I've had it! What

he is doing is not turning me on, but I figure I'll give him a break—let him whack off while he's grooving on my arm. So—I try to relax as I look up at the screen. Well, there is Holly Woodlawn—she's shoving a needle into the ass-cheek of some high-school kid. The kid passes out. Holly sticks out her very long tongue—she licks her lips in delight as she gets ready to go down on him.

Okay! In the back row, the skinny guy is still slobbering over my arm. Suddenly, he stops. He sits up, and he leans toward me. I can see his eyes in the dimness now—they're big and bluish-green—he's got soft eyes—very kind eyes. "Uh, can I ask you a favor?" he says.

"What is it?"

"Uh—do you mind if I sit in the seat on the other side of you?"

"Huh? What in hell for?" I want to know.

"I want to kiss your other arm," he says. "The one with the tattoo on it!"

"You want to what?"

"Your arm with the tattoo—I want to make love to it!"

"I don't think so!" I shake my head. "I want to watch the movie!" I can see the hurt look in his big eyes as he get up quickly—as he moves back to his original seat. Rick, I don't know how to explain it—but I got the weirdest feeling when he says he wants to sit in the seat on the other side of me and make love to my other arm—it's hard to explain, but I had a gut reaction. Hell—it was like I'm two muscular arms, and that's it. I felt like I could unscrew my arms and give them to him and walk down to the lobby for popcorn while he stayed in the back row drooling over my arms. I even imagined him taking my arms home with him—it gave me the willies! (Looks at his watch.) Uh, Rick? Will you be home when I get home from the Strand? Yeah, I'll be back around seven. Then we can go for coffee at the Flore, okay? I'll give you a ring. Bye!

(MIKE hangs up, takes off his T-shirt, throws it on the floor, finds another—one that says "Warriors" on it. He puts it on, checks the mirror to make sure it shows off his arms. Grabs a different pair of jeans, pulls them on, checks himself out in the mirror again to make certain the fit is good and snug. Puts on his boots—puts on his jacket—puts on his cap. Stares intently at his reflection in the mirror.

MIKE exits.

A moment later, MIKE re-enters. He takes off his jacket, grabs the dumbbells, does a set of curls. He makes a muscle and stares at it intently in the mirror.)

MIKE: I love you! (He kisses the tattoo, his tongue moving from his triceps to his biceps. He puts on his jacket again, and stares at his reflection in the mirror. He winks at his reflection, and exits.)

CURTAIN

George Birimisa's LOOKING FOR MR. AMERICA

A benefit for the
GAY AND LESBIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
and the HARVEY MILK INSTITUTE

Saturday, May 23, 8:00 p.m. and
Sunday, May 24, 3:00 p.m.

NEW COLLEGE THEATER
777 Valencia Street, SF

Tickets: \$15

GLHS Members & Seniors: \$12

Students: \$10



"When I performed *Looking for Mr. America* in 1998, after at least fifty, maybe sixty performances, I felt I really got it right for the first time. The feelings were honest and I had revealed myself fully."

Poster design featuring bodybuilder Bill Pearl by the Harvey Milk Institute.

Bill Pearl Photo from Brian Walker's website, "Classic Bodybuilders of the Golden Era," www.classicbodybuilders.com.

LOOKING FOR MR. AMERICA

(1994)

A Solo Performance Piece

Looking for Mr. America received its première at Josie's Cabaret and Juice Joint in San Francisco in September 1994. The play was performed by the author and directed by Joseph Leonardi. The author also performed *Looking for Mr. America* at La MaMa E.T.C. in New York in 1995, and a multimedia production was presented at the New College in San Francisco in 1996.

CHARACTER:

RICHIE, a sissy as a child but turns into tough, working-man type as he grows up. The actor playing RICHIE plays all of the characters. The actor should be at least forty years old.

THE TIME: 1994.

THE SET: A chair in the middle of the stage.

(RICHIE is kicking a can as he comes onstage. He is wearing a Pittsburgh Pirates cap with the brim sideways.)

RICHIE: Whewie! (Wipes sweat from face.) Hot—hot summer afternoon—(Hears a sound. Crawls to barn.) sneak into barn. Mikey and Angie, my older brothers, are dumping grapes into a great big vat—(Stands on chair. Looks into vat.) stand on tiptoe on apple crate—peek over edge of the vat. (Sees “Daddy.”) Holy cow! Daddy! Daddy—naked! Powerful back—sweaty! He stomps the grapes with his bare feet. Purple juice squishes between his toes—his legs drip with grape juice. He whirls around. Wow! Monster—monster between his legs—(Gets down from chair.) with fuzzy hair all around it.

DADDY: Hey, Mikey, that little twerp ain't my kid. Yer mom, she screws everything in pants. Look at him—blond hair and sissy ways!

RICHIE: Stumble out of barn. (Hides behind chair.) Jesus, why don't Daddy ever talk to me? It's always Mikey he talks to. Mikey the blockhead, always bragging about Daddy—yeah—

MIKEY: Daddy's the strongest man in the whole world. Daddy won all his prizefights with a haymaker in the first round.

RICHIE: It's only a few hours before the end of Prohibition—(Car door slams.) Federal agents raid the barn—they burst open the barrels of bootleg wine—they empty the giant vat. (Delighted.) It seems they saw the big piles of grape pulp in front of the barn. (Laughs, then runs into the house.) Mom? Mom? (Sees “Mom,” stops dead in his tracks.) It's the last straw for Mom—she's packing her suitcase.

MOM: My little darlin' [she says to me]. I'm leaving your father, but don't worry, I'll come and get you as soon as I get settled.

RICHIE: Problem is she never gets settled. (Sitting in chair. Nothing moves except his eyes—they move from stage left to stage right.) One. (Again from stage left to stage right.) Two—three—four—five. Stop counting the floozies that move in and out. (Again his eyes move from stage left to stage right.) Then Daddy's gone too! Next day a man in a suit and tie rings the doorbell. (Eagerly rushes to door.)

MAN IN SUIT: Your father has tuberculosis of the lungs. (Looks at watch.) We've sent him to a sanatorium.

RICHIE: Oh, brother. God-awful Boys Ranch. (Stands at attention.) Roman Catholic Salesian Brothers. (Sees "Brother Joe.") Brother Joe. He's got big muscles under his cassock. (As "Brother Joe," runs downstage, pantomimes hiking his cassock above his knees and throwing a pass.) He hikes up his cassock and plays football with the older boys. (Jumping up and down on the sidelines.) "Gee, Brother Joe, you threw another touchdown pass!" Get as near to him as I can—can't get enough of the sweaty smell of him. Christmas Eve—rec room. Brother Joe bangs shut his Bible.

BROTHER JOE: Boys—I'm afraid your father passed away early this morning.

RICHIE: Mikey throws a conniption fit—bangs his head against the wall. Angie is sobbing. Me—start to cry but Brother Joe puts his arm around me—presses my head against his belly—stop crying—seventh heaven! (Pause.) Brother Joe quits the priesthood—gets married.

(Downstage. Talking to audience.) Four dreary years go by—go to Mass and Holy Communion every single day—(Down on his knees.) pray and pray some more—how many thousands of sermons do I listen to? High Mass—the incense—it makes me sick to my stomach—(Looks up to heaven.) then—then the miracle happens. (Jumps up.) Aunt Martha, Mom's older sister, wants me to come live with her in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—she signs a bunch of papers, and—just like that—at twelve years old, ain't a charity case no more—ain't a ward of the County.

(Sits in chair. Gently rocks back and forth. Happy.) On the Greyhound—all—all by myself! Sit across from this good-looking blond guy. Gal with big bazooms gets on the bus—sits down next to him. (Scrunches down in his seat. He is spying.) He's—he's got her skirt above her knees—his hand between her legs—she closes her eyes—her mouth is wide open. Her hand—it moves up his pants leg—she squeezes the big lump.

BLOND GUY: Jack me off [he says].

RICHIE: She takes it out of his pants—she pulls on it like she's milking a cow. Darn it—the lights go on—we pull into Tucson. (Runs upstage left.) Rush to the lavatory—take out my peter and milk it—ooooh—ooooh—ooooh! All over the wall of the stall—what is it? Funny-looking stuff—milky white—(Touches sperm on the wall. Puts finger to his nose. Sniffs.) Smells like wallpaper paste! (Rushes back to chair, sits.) Rush back to bus—don't know how many times I milk my peter—have to stop—blood's coming out of the end of it. (Both hands on crotch.)

North Side of Pittsburgh—black snow from the steel mills. Live in this tiny room with Aunt Martha—she pays more attention to Skippy, her white Spitz, than she does me—always kissing him and picking fleas off his belly. Every time I go near him—(Tries to pet the dog.) his lip curls up over his yellow fangs.

(Upstage. Big smile as he contemplates going to school.) Seventh grade! (Moves downstage. Sees the classroom. Stops.) Hate it. (Moves stage right. Sees “Mario” go by. Stops dead in his tracks.) Wow! Mario—Mario Canzoneri—new boy from Chicago—body of an athlete—struts around with his chin stuck out like he owns the world—at recess he smokes Old Golds. (To audience.) All the boys say he gets all the pussy he wants.

(The sound of a shower. Pantomimes soaping himself, looks at “Mario” out of the corner of his eye.) Shower—me and Mario—all alone—other boys gone—can’t stop looking at him—hair—hair all over his chest—down to his bellybutton—(Grabs imaginary towel to cover himself, turns away.) grab my towel to hide my boner—(Runs upstage. Looks over his shoulder.) he grins—winks at me!

(Tiptoes behind chair. A loud whisper.) Auntie sound asleep—snoring—Skippy on edge of bed—red-rimmed eyes full of hate. (Sticks out his tongue at “Skippy.” RICHIE sits in chair.) Grab my fountain pen—write by the light of the gas jets.

(Lights turn dark red.) Whoosh—me—Dierdre from Ireland—long golden hair down to my shoulders—emerald-green eyes with long lashes—milk-white complexion—the neck of a swan—me—carry a parasol—go with my father to the Yukon Territory—he gets killed by a polar bear—(Very dramatic.) me—on an ice floe in the middle of the river—(Sees “Mario the Mountie.”) Mario—Mario—Mario—so handsome in his red Mountie uniform on his white horse—he rescues me from the ice floe—he carries me to a log cabin on top of a mountain. (“Mountie” is standing over RICHIE, who is in the chair. “Mountie” takes off his hat.)

MOUNTIE: I fell madly in love with you the minute I saw you. (“Mountie” moves downstage, looks out the window.)

RICHIE: He moves to the window—looks at the snowflakes.

MOUNTIE: We’ll be snowed in until the spring. (“Mountie” moves upstage to chair. Looks soulfully at RICHIE.) I have all winter to make love to you.

RICHIE: He takes me in his strong arms and kisses me. (Lights come back up.) I come all over myself.

Extra! Extra! Read all about it! Hitler invades Poland. (Moves downstage. Talks to audience.) Summer—sell papers—one of my regular customers is a lady who’s so poor she can’t afford the three cents for a paper. A penny here—a penny there. Every afternoon she makes me a cigarette on her roll-your-own machine—smoke with her—feel grown-up.

Grope my way down the dim hall of her tenement—stinks of cabbage and cat piss—door cracks open—hand jerks me into room—shadowy figure down on his knees. Holy cow! His mouth—it’s—it’s like a fuckin’ furnace! God! I—ooooh! (Plops down in chair.) Pants down around my ankles—shadowy figure moves to

the window—pulls up the shade—old—old and wrinkled. Kneels down again—wipes my cock and balls with a handkerchief.

OLD MAN: You got a lot of spunk in you, Sonny!

RICHIE: Gives me four bits. (Stands up and skips downstage.) Skip down the street on my way to Isaly's for a rainbow ice-cream cone . . . Gee! Maybe, uh—maple walnut? Wonder—wonder what he did to me—will it turn me into a queer? But can't help myself—go back to his tiny room every week—save up the moolah he gives me—gonna buy me a radio!

Last day before Easter vacation—go into cloakroom—(Moves behind chair.) to get my jacket—door swings open behind me—Mario jumps me—we wrestle—bang against the walls—(Bangs against the walls.) He gets me in a headlock—(Gets down on his knees.) jams my face into his crotch—can feel his boner through his pants—the heat of it burns my face. Jerk—jerk away from him—(Gets away. Runs up behind chair. Pantomimes grabbing paper tablet.) grab the paper tablet with the story of Mario the Mountie in his red uniform—(Rips it up and throws it in trash.) rip it up—throw it in the trash. (Runs stage left.)

Dark—selling papers in Elizabeth Park—almost deserted—steelworker—behind a tree—lunch pail in one hand—his dick in the other. He looks down at it—then at me.

STEELWORKER: You want it, kid?

RICHIE: Uh—want what?

STEELWORKER: Put your mouth on it, kid.

RICHIE: (Takes a tentative step toward "Steelworker.") Put—put my mouth on it?

STEELWORKER: Yeah—give it a kiss.

RICHIE: (takes another step toward "Steelworker.") You—you want me to—?

STEELWORKER: Yeah—kiss it, kid.

RICHIE: (Mesmerized, slowly moves to "Steelworker." Gets down on his knees. Closes his eyes. Gives the imaginary penis a loud, smacking kiss.) Big hands grab the back of my head—pushes—grunts—sighs—(Opens his eyes.) buttons his fly.

STEELWORKER: Thanks a lot, kid. See you around.

RICHIE: (Follows "Steelworker" with his eyes. Spits two, three times. Jumps up. Runs upstage. Looks over his shoulder. Slowly circles stage.) Spend the next six months haunting Elizabeth Park—looking—looking for the steelworker.

Midnight—playing penny-ante poker in the newspaper shack—win a big pot—over a buck ahead. Door bursts open—there he is—it's him—Mario—struts in with fourteen-year-old Flo. (Confides to audience.) Nickname "Flat Foot Floogie with a Floy Floy." Story goes she gives a blow job for a candy bar. (Back to "Mario" and "Flo.") He—picks her up—puts her on the counter—he—he—he pulls down her panties—

MARIO: (Sniffs. Turns to "the guys.") Hey, guys, if you get past the bellybutton and it don' smell like fish, it's okey-dokey. Line up for free pussy—after me.

RICHIE: Mario drops his pants—pulls down his B.V.D.s. His boner—almost touches his bellybutton.

MARIO: Hey, Richie, about time you got yourself a piece of ass—make a man out of you.

RICHIE: I, uh—had it lots and lots of times.

MARIO: Ain't what I heard, but to show you I'm your pal, you can screw Flat Foot Floogie before me. I'll take sloppy seconds. (Pushes RICHIE towards "Flo.")

RICHIE: (Looks at her nakedness.) Uh—gotta take a leak—(Runs out of newspaper shack.) Jesus, Mario, why do you have to be like that?

Quit Allegheny High in my junior year—go to work for H.J. Heinz loading cans of baked beans—(Pantomimes loading the boxes of beans.) Mario—now the star quarterback for Allegheny High—me—stay away from the football games—shit—got Mario in my head twenty-four hours a day. Mario—Mario—Mario—can't blink without seeing him—how many times do I wake up in the middle of the night with come all over my belly?

Finally move out of the tiny room with Aunt Martha—get me a furnished room—got me a radio—yeah—listen to "The Shadow" and "The Green Hornet," but spend most of my time over my stacks of Strength and Health magazines—full of husky bodybuilders in tight-fitting trunks. Wow! John Grimek—the first Mr. America—never get tired of jacking off over him.

(Slowly turns Pittsburgh Pirates cap around to face front, denoting passage of time.) Five years drag by—how many crummy jobs after H.J. Heinz—? Each one worser than the one before—me—pick up steelworkers. All they want is a quick blow job. Afterwards they say:

STEELWORKER: Next time you see me walking down the street, you don't know me.

RICHIE: It's the final straw when this fat slob walks up to me on Federal Street, grabs his crotch, and says:

FAT SLOB: You wanna gnaw on this, Richie?

RICHIE: (Looks around, humiliated. To the "Fat Slob.") I—I ain't like that.

FAT SLOB: Are you kidding? Every guy on the North Side knows you're a cocksucker.

RICHIE: It's then it hits me like a ton of bricks—what in hell am I doin' in this crummy town in the first place—but where? New York City? Hey! All those world-champion bodybuilders working out on Muscle Beach—yeah—Southern California! Heck, it's so hot out there, I can sleep on the beach—maybe Steve Reeves will come walkin' by, and—

So—who is there to say goodbye to? Aunt Martha? Skippy? So—only a few bucks in my pocket—(Downstage. Sticks out his thumb.) Stick out my thumb—get ride after ride after ride—then get stuck in the middle of nowhere on Route 66—sleep in a haystack—in the morning this preacher guy picks me up—says he's going all the way to Los Angeles—can't believe my luck—we stay in this fancy hotel in Memphis—he orders dinner from room service for both of us—then—then he pulls out his—Bible.

PREACHER: The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt and their ways are vile; there is no one who does good. God looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.
Everyone—

RICHIE: (Jumps up, puts hand under his chin.) Got his religious shit up to here— (Moves stage right.) take a long, long shower. Guess what? (Center stage, really upset and angry.) In the middle of the night, the holy man goes down on me. (Absolute fury as he pantomimes grabbing the "Preacher's" head.) Grab his head—fuck him in the face! Early morning—grab my suitcase.

PREACHER: Let me help you out, my son. (Reaches into coat pocket for wallet.)

RICHIE: (To "Preacher.") Keep your fuckin' moolah. (Crosses upstage. Pantomimes closing door with a bang.) Slam the door behind me. (Crosses behind chair and downstage. Wipes forehead of sweat. Sticks out thumb.) Stranded in New Mexico. Twenty-five other hitchhikers trying to get a ride on Route 66. Can't keep my eyes off this guy with "MOM" tattooed on his chest. (Jumps up and sits on the back of the chair.) We catch a freight together—barely out of Tucumcari he pulls out his dick—starts to jack off—we end up blowing each other four, five times—(Ashamed.) don't talk about it—act like it didn't happen. (Sniffs, smells under arm.) Stink to high heaven by the time we pull into the freight yard in Los Angeles. (Pulls shirt up over his head to protect himself from the rain.) It's raining cats and dogs so don't make no sense to go out to Muscle Beach.

(Sees Main Street, Los Angeles.) Los Angeles, especially Main Street—it's as crummy and filthy as the North Side of Pittsburgh—(Fascinated. Stops protecting himself from the rain.) but everything else is different. Main Street—penny arcade with jism all over the floor—a flophouse where you can get a bed for two bits— (Looks up at a marquee.) a burleycue theater starring Tempest Storm. (Timid.) Go into this bar—walk into the men's room—(Shocked.) a six-foot-six Negro man—dressed like a girl—(The "Negro Man" pantomimes pulling up his skirt.) pulls up his skirt—hauls out a twelve-inch dick. Looks at me and says:

NEGRO MAN: You don't know, honey? All drag queens have big pricks.

RICHIE: After a week, the rain stops—catch a streetcar to Santa Monica. (Very excited.) Gee! Maybe a job in a hamburger joint near Muscle Beach—can just see myself waiting on all those husky bodybuilders—(Points.) there—there it is—that's gotta be Muscle Beach—all those guys workin' out—but wait a minute—they're old and they got paunches—can't be Muscle Beach. (Rushes up to "Bodybuilder.") Rush up to this one bodybuilder with big arms and legs like a bird. Uh—this ain't Muscle Beach, is it?

BODYBUILDER: (Does a double biceps pose—showing off his build. Squeaky voice.) The one and only.

RICHIE: (Disappointed.) Hang around for the rest of the afternoon—don't see a single bodybuilder who looks like he stepped out of Strength and Health—catch a streetcar back to L.A.

Get a job as a counterman in a greasy spoon on Main Street—rent a cheap hotel room—two weeks into the job, the cash register is three bucks short—guess

who gets fired? Yeah, me—didn't knock down a fuckin' dime. Get locked out of my hotel room.

HOTEL CLERK: Pay your back rent if you want your suitcase [says the hotel clerk].

RICHIE: (Discouraged.) Walk—block after block after block. (Sees Pershing Square.) Wow! Pershing Square! It's like some crazy paradise. Palm trees everywhere—bums sleep under the banyan trees—a lady in rags stands on a green bench with a megaphone.

RAG LADY: (Stands on chair, cups hands around mouth.) Down with the capitalist oppressors! Josef Stalin is our savior!

RICHIE: (Gets down from chair.) A man in a sandwich board that reads: "Hot dog fifteen cents. Stan's Diner on Spring Street." Young toughs stand around with their thumbs hooked into the pockets of their blue jeans—rough-trade hustlers. Then I see the kid—can't be a day over sixteen—thick pancake make-up—plucked eyebrows—rouge—lipstick—his pants are so tight I can see the crack in his ass. ("Bruiser" rushes up to "Mathew the Kid," looks down at him.) This great big bruiser rushes up to him.

BRUISER: Wouldn't let you suck my dick if you brushed your teeth.

RICHIE: The kid puts his hands on his hips—raises two pencil-thin eyebrows and—"Mathew" kicks "Bruiser" in the groin.) kicks the big bruiser in the nuts. The guy goes down screaming.

MATHEW: That'll teach you, Mary [says the kid]. Nobody, but nobody, fucks around with Miss Barbara Stanwyck!

RICHIE: (Retreats upstage. Sits on chair.) Park my butt on a green bench—this guy with a red nose sits down next to me—looks at my crotch—licks his lips.

RED-NOSED MAN: (Loud whisper. Surreptitious.) You're a very good-looking young man.

RICHIE: Just hitched in from Chicago. Flat bloke.

RED-NOSED MAN: I can put you up for the night, feed you, and give you a dollar in the morning.

RICHIE: I ain't a queer, Mister.

RED-NOSED MAN: I didn't think you were. (Looks RICHIE up and down.) I just adore rough trade. All you have to do is lie back and enjoy it.

RICHIE: Mister, it's a deal.

Two months go by—green bench in the daytime—Harold's Bar at night. Harold's, where the rough-trade hustlers meet the old aunties—me—wait outside until it gets crowded—slip in—grab an empty bottle. Sooner or later, someone will buy me a beer—almost always score with a john.

One day, the kid who calls himself Barbara Stanwyck plops his ass on my green bench—bums a Chesterfield—puts it in his pocket, then tells me his life story.

MATHEW: I'm from Pickens, Ohio. My real name is Mathew Dolan—isn't that depressing? (No answer.) Well, when I was a sophomore in high school, I had this crush on Hank Green—the centerfielder on our baseball team—ummmm—pure heaven. Well, Mary, for two years we had a mad, mad love affair. (Sees

look on RICHIE's face.) Yes it was mutual. But, one day he got himself a girlfriend. So, two weeks later, I sashay into the locker room and there he is with his baseball buddies—all of them naked. They wave their dicks at me and yell, "Come and get your dinner, Mathew!" Puh-lease! That was this gal's cue—so at sweet sixteen—gather my skirts, but where? Ah!—"Go West, Young Lady!"—Catch a freight—two hoboes—one of them holds me down while the other—(A moment of pain at the memory, but he hides it.) won't go into all the gory details, but—B.O. like you wouldn't believe. Get a job at a hot-dog stand on Main Street—do a little hustling on the side—save up enough money to take classes in karate. When I get my brown belt, I change my name to Barbara Stanwyck, and here I am—hustling Cannibal Island.

RICHIE: Uh—how come you call it Cannibal Island?

MATHEW: It's because everyone eats everyone else. (Pause.) Where you staying, Mary?

RICHIE: The name is Richie.

MATHEW: (Looks to heaven.) Where you staying, Richie?

RICHIE: Right here on this bench.

MATHEW: (With compassion.) Oh, honey, come live with Barbara. Lincoln Hotel—eight dollars a week, and—don't worry—Barbara won't make a pass at you.

RICHIE: So—the two of us—seedy hotel on Figueroa—bathroom down the hall. Me—get home two, three in the morning after turning a trick—there's Barbara—yakking away—dishing his tricks—imitating them. (Laughs.) Never get to sleep before dawn—could listen to him forever. Sometimes we don't go to bed—go to Clifton's Cafeteria, with the waterfall—always an old auntie there to buy us breakfast.

(Tender and caring.) Yeah, me and Barbara—after we room together for a year, don't bother me none when he calls me "Mary"—go to the movies together—almost always starring Barbara Stanwyck—don't know how many times I see Stella Dallas—go to see the Dodgers play in their new home in the Coliseum. Me—get the influenza real bad—Barbara fusses over me—takes care of me—never had nobody pay so much attention to me before. Then it happens. Barbara falls for this straight hustler from Brooklyn—come home one night—Barbara's gone—gone—only thing left is a lipstick.

Back and forth—back and forth—green bench—Harold's Bar—then one night—don't score—blinding light of closing time. See this guy leaning against a lamppost—basket down to his knees—rugged looking—bashed-in nose—I better be careful.

MURPHY: Hiya, [he says]. What's cookin'?

RICHIE: Uh—nothin'—nothin' much. Just, uh—just cruisin' around.

MURPHY: What are you cruisin' around for?

RICHIE: Give you one guess.

MURPHY: You know where I can sack out?

RICHIE: Uh—my hotel room—a few blocks from here.

MURPHY: (Gropes himself.) What—what do you do in the sack?

RICHIE: Uh—well, uh—I'd like you to, uh—be top man.

He hits me in the nose—punches me in the belly—(Falls to his knees, hands behind his back.) Handcuffs? Handcuffs? (Flashing red lights—ear-splitting sound of sirens. RICHIE staggers to his feet, is dragged to chair. Sits.) Squad car? Squad car? (To “Murphy.”) What—what did I do? What the fuck did I do? (To audience.) Police headquarters—fingerprints? Fingerprints? (Looks at hands.) Covered with ink and blood—(Takes off cap.) mug shot—queer tank with a bunch of drag queens.

Morning—Public Defender—looks bored as he hands me the police report of Officer Murphy. (Reads.) “I was checking out the Highlife Arcade on Main Street on July 27th at two A.M. when I saw one Richard Ivanisec exiting a booth with his fly unbuttoned—(Incredulous.) He was so intox—intoxicated he could hardly stand up. He said to me, ‘I give great blow jobs but I also take it up the ass. Do you have a big one?’”

(To “Public Defender.”) That fuckin’ liar. All I said was I wanted him to be top man.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: I’m afraid it’s his word against yours, Mr. Ivanisec.

RICHIE: I wasn’t in that fuckin’ arcade. I was in Harold’s Bar.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: The judge won’t believe you. I suggest you plead guilty.

RICHIE: You nuts or something? Look, I’m gonna testify I got nasty with Officer Murphy when he couldn’t give me a cigarette, so he beat me up and arrested me.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: I’m afraid if you lie, I can’t defend you.

RICHIE: I get it—it’s okay for the police to lie, but not for me, right?

PUBLIC DEFENDER: I’m not convinced that Officer Murphy is lying.

RICHIE: Jesus. Whose side are you on? Wouldn’t let you defend me if you was the last person on earth—yeah—gonna defend myself.

(Stands.) I want a jury trial. (Sees the courtroom. Frightened.) Fuckin’ courtroom. Am I really going to defend myself? (Sits.) D.A. calls Officer Murphy to the stand—no longer in tight-fighting blue jeans—he’s wearing a double-breasted sharkskin suit—tie with a big Windsor knot in it—so—so handsome!

(Lights dim to the red of fantasy.) Motorcycle cop—black leather jacket—high, high black boots—aviator sunglasses—gun in one hand—his other—unbuttons his fly—pulls out—pulls out a monster of a dick—

MOTORCYCLE COP: Get down on your knees where you belong!

RICHIE: Wrap my arms around his thick legs.

(Lights back up.) Bang of the gavel. Jesus, what the fuck—you nuts or something, Richie? Dreaming about a cop? That son of a bitch is your enemy. (Looks longingly at “Officer Murphy.”) Officer Murphy turns to the jury.

MURPHY: I hate using vulgar language, members of the jury, but in the interest of justice I must report the exact words of the defendant. I have written them down. (Takes report from breast pocket and reads.) Quote: “I give great blow jobs, but I prefer to get fucked in the ass by a big prick.” Unquote.

RICHIE: (Looks at jury. Feels guilty.) Can't help but look at the jury. Twenty-four eyes stare at me like I crawled out of the nearest gutter. Officer Murphy ends his testimony by saying:

MURPHY: I showed the defendant my badge and handcuffed him. I used regulation procedure.

RICHIE: Fuckin' liar—want to cross-examine him—can't think of nothin' to ask him, so—(Stands up. One hand on Bible, other hand raised.) take the stand in my own defense. (To the court.) Never been in the Highlife Arcade. I'm in Harold's Bar on Main Street until a few minutes after two A.M. on July 27th—when I leave I see this guy leaning against a lamppost—he's wearing blue jeans and a polo shirt—try to bum a cigarette off him—tells me to get lost. I make a wise remark—boom—he coldcocks me—still got bruises where he hit me—see? (Hand to face. Dramatic pause.) This is the first time I've been arrested, and I am not a homosexual.

(To audience.) D.A. cross-examines me—can't get me to change my story. He asks for a two-hour recess. The two hours seem like forever.

(Sees the "New Witness" enter the courtroom.) Jesus, the new witness—got flatfoot written all over his Irish face. The D.A. asks him where he was at two A.M. on July 27th.

NEW WITNESS: I was outside the Highlife Arcade on Main Street. Officer Murphy exited the Highlife with the defendant. The defendant's fly was open. He was so intoxicated, he could hardly stand up.

RICHIE: The D.A. asks him if he sees that person in this courtroom. The son of a bitch points to me. The pricks—not a chance of a snowball in hell—takes the jury fifteen minutes—yeah, guilty—guilty of lewd conduct in public—hundred-dollar fine or ninety days in jail, but what really pisses me of is—got to register as a sex deviate—yeah, for saying I wanted Officer Murphy to be top man. (Crosses to jail.) So—back to the queer tank—ninety days seems like ninety years—finally get out—(Sticks out thumb.) stick out my thumb—get the hell out of the police state of Los Angeles.

Frisco—dishwasher—busboy—finally graduate to waiter. (Foot on chair. Exercising with a dumbbell.) Join Vic Tanny's Gym on Market Street. After a year—job as trainer at Vic Tanny's even though I don't know much about bodybuilding. Butch McKenna—the boss—former hockey player with two front teeth missing—even though he's got a potbelly, he's still two hundred pounds of muscle—married to this red-headed birdbrain. (Hands on hips.) I think he knows I'm queer—keeps telling me to take my hands off my hips. (Hurriedly takes hands off hips.) Been working there a couple of months when he calls me into his office after we close.

BUTCH: My steady piece of ass ran off to Mama. Bin walkin' around with a stiff leg. See? (Turns around, outlines his penis in his pants.) Big enuf for you?

RICHIE: Don't need a second invitation—yeah—blow him—then—he rips at my sweat pants—he's down on his knees—he sucks my dick. Next day, he calls me into his office—gives me this bullshit story—says he's got too many trainers working for him—yeah—he fires me.

Back to hustling. Get me a cheap hotel room in the Tenderloin. Ain't like the good old days in Pershing Square, where the johns drooled all over me. Guess I ain't a spring chicken no more. (Moves downstage.) Polk Street. Turn a trick for five bucks. Sometimes it's a hamburger at McDonald's and a pack of cigarettes.

(Moves stage left.) At last my luck changes. Get a job at Greyhound at Seventh and Market. (Pantomimes typing.) I'm a typist. During my lunch break, I sneak up to the men's room on the second floor. Not only do the stalls have glory holes, they're covered in graffiti: "SHOW IT HARD FOR QUICK BLOW JOB."—"HERE I SIT BROKEN-HEARTED, TRIED TO SHIT AND ONLY FARTED."

Ah, spring! Fog rolls in from Twin Peaks. Head for a tearoom on Market. A teenager who looks like a farmboy falls into step with me.

JAZZ: Howdy, Mister!

RICHIE: Weren't you sitting on a bench back at the Greyhound?

JAZZ: Yes, I was, sir, but to be honest about it, sir, I saw you staring at me and, well—this man back in Great Falls—that's in Montana, sir. He's just like you—if you know what I mean.

RICHIE: I don't make it with chicken. I don't want to end up in San Quentin. (To audience.) He pulls out his wallet—he shows me his driver's license. (To "Jazz.") Jasper Donovan, uh—twenty-six? You don't look a day over sixteen, Jasper.

JAZZ: Everybody calls me Jazz.

RICHIE: Okay, Jazz. Let's go! (To audience.) I barely open the door and he's taking off all his clothes. We end up having a wild, all-night session, and it's not just one way. Whewie! I stagger out of bed at dawn to go to work. Jazz—he's sleepin' like a baby—drool out of the side of his mouth—jet-black hair in ringlets on his forehead—ruby lips—baby fat on his cheeks—he looks like a choirboy. (Kneels next to "Jazz.") I kiss him on the cheek. He lets out a deep sigh. I kiss him gently on the mouth. (Gets up, moves backwards toward door.) It's hard for me to believe—here in my bed—this wonderful—wonderful young man. (Exits.)

(If there is to be an interval, it happens here. The original production had no intermission.)

RICHIE: (Enters.) I get home after work. He made the bed—he cleaned up the room. He even washed the one window that looks out on a brick wall. (Listens.) There's a clang from the kitchen. (Rushes center stage, behind chair.) Jazz enters with a steaming pot.

JAZZ: (Pantomimes ladling stew from pot.) Don't know nothin' about cookin', Richie. It's a can of Dinty Moore beef stew. Got it cheap at a place called Dented Cans. Sit down, Richie.

RICHIE: (Surprised.) After a week he gets a job—he's a bag boy at Cala Foods. As far as I know, he doesn't have nothin' to do with girls, even though he's always talkin' about them, and he's got Playboy and Penthouse all over the place. (Pause.) He gets pissed off if I call him "Honey," and he won't kiss me on the mouth. (Center stage, directly to audience.) I can't figure it out—he'll suck my

dick but he won't kiss me on the mouth. For the next year it's a dream come true. I'm so in love with Jazz, I don't go near a porno bookstore or a tearoom. We get a one-bedroom in the Mission. I go out and buy all this furniture. I fix up the place—everything!

It's early December. Jazz's hours are changed—swing shift—four to twelve. (To "Jazz.") Gee, Jazz, when will I get to see you? When you get home, I'll be sound asleep.

JAZZ: Don't worry, Richie. I'll wake you up if I get horny.

RICHIE: (Alone.) Jesus! Almost always comin' home to a cold, empty apartment—it gives me the creeps—then—one day—just like that—I find myself in a porno bookstore on Polk Street. I head for the exit—stop dead in my tracks—(Looks around.) So what's wrong with hangin' out here? Ain't gonna do nothin'—just kill some time—(Sits in chair. Mouth falls open as if in a trance.) watch some movies. (Pulls out of trance.) I can't believe it when I look at my watch—(Looks at audience.) have I really been here three hours?

It turns into a routine for the next couple of months. When I get real horny I go into a booth—(Sits in chair.) all by myself and—(Pantomimes masturbation.) jack off. One day I see this tough-looking stud in a motorcycle jacket, with a helmet under his arm. He gives me the eye and goes into a booth. (In conflict. Starts to follow the stud. Stops. Finally follows him.)

It's a week before Christmas. I'm checking out the men's room on the second floor. I can't believe my eyes! The spitting image of Marlon Brando—he's standing at a urinal with a great big boner on. (Walks over to "Brando.") I walk over to him. I grab it.

BRANDO: (Jerks away.) You nuts or something? (Looks around. Out of the side of his mouth.) You got a place to go?

RICHIE: Let's go into a stall. It'll only take a minute.

BRANDO: Uh—you live around here?

RICHIE: (Points.) Only a few blocks away.

BRANDO: Okay. Let's go. (Pantomimes putting peter in pants.)

RICHIE: We grab a cab to my apartment. I rush into the bathroom. I hide my watch and my wallet in the laundry basket. I hurry into the living room. He's sitting in an easy chair with his pants down around his hairy legs. (Starts to kneel.) The door bursts open—it's Jazz. He's motionless. Then he grabs me by the shirt front. His fist smashes into my face—he hits me again and again and again. (Falls to floor.) Jazz is out the door. (Looks at "Brando.") The man who looks like Marlon Brando is still sitting in the easy chair—he's still got a hard-on. He gives me a disgusted look. He pulls out a handkerchief—he jacks off into it—he throws it on the floor. The door bangs behind him. (Jumps up and rushes upstage.) I grab a jug of wine from the refrigerator. I smash it against the sink. (Screaming.) SON OF A BITCH!

Next thing I know, I'm in the porno bookstore on Polk Street. (To "Clerk.") Roll of quarters, please. (Sits, pantomimes putting a quarter in the slot. Sobbing.) I'm still crying when this guy sticks his dick through the glory hole. I stop crying. I

blow him. One minute I'm watching a movie—the next minute I'm sucking another dick. (Hopeless. Exhausted.) How many? Stop counting. I finally drag my ass home at dawn. (Opens the door.) Oh, brother. My stereo—T.V.—even my radio—all of them in smithereens on the floor. I rush into the bedroom. (Looks around.) All of Jazz's things are gone. (Hesitates, then moves stage left.) Don't know how I do it, but somehow I go to work. (Pantomimes typing.) Brad, who works behind the ticket counter, tells me that Jazz bought a ticket for Great Falls, Montana. (Sits in chair, defeated.) It's back to a piss-in-the-sink hotel room in the Tenderloin.

The years slip by—(Slowly moves upstage. Shoulders sag as he gets older.) dull—dull—dull—(Takes off cap and hangs it on hook.) spend most of my time cruising and watching T.V. (Looks in mirror on fourth wall.) One morning, look in the mirror—nothin' left of my hair—even my earlobes are getting longer—my neck—the flesh hanging—(Grabs loose flesh under chin.)

(Crosses right of chair. Pantomimes hanging on strap on bus.) Get on a bus—lady in her fifties offers me her seat—Jesus, do I look that old?

Get my yearly physical—doc schedules me for an H.I.V. test. Shit—no way—me get AIDS? Maybe seven, eight thousand tricks, and no syph—no clap—not even the fuckin' crabs. So—no big deal—take the dumb H.I.V. test. Doc calls me into his office.

DOCTOR: Mr. Ivanisec, you've tested positive for the H.I.V. virus—(Finally looks at RICHIE.) I suggest you join a support group.

RICHIE: Numb—don't feel a thing. Castro Street—might as well face it—hell, nobody sees me—don't exist—me—nothing but garbage. Who gives a shit for an old faggot? One thing I know for sure—ever get those purple splotches, and it's a swan dive off the Golden Gate Bridge.

Heading for my favorite tearoom—look at the basket on that guy! (Then he sees "Mathew.") See this old queen sashaying down the street—must be in his fifties—can't keep his hands off the stud with him—a two-hundred-dollar hustler, I bet. Old queen's wearing a dangly rainbow earring—pink triangle on his jacket, but—something about him—something familiar. (To "Mathew.") Barbara? Barbara Stanwyck?

MATHEW: (Utter shock.) Holy Mary. As I live and breathe. Richie Ivanisec.

RICHIE: It is Barbara!

MATHEW: It was Barbara. Back to Mathew Dolan. (Hands on hips.) I gave up Miss Stanwyck eons ago.

RICHIE: It's bin over thirty years.

MATHEW: Puh-lease. Donald, this is Richie. We were sisters in Pershing Square during the Spanish-American War.

RICHIE: Hi, Donald. Mathew, I see you're up to your old tricks!

MATHEW: No way. We're domestic partners—we were married in City Hall. (Suddenly serious.) Oh, Richie—all these years—I feel guilty for leaving you in the lurch the way I did—I was obsessed with this straight hustler from Brooklyn—he ended up ripping me off—what on earth was his name?

(Sincere.) Please—please accept my apology. It was a rotten thing to do. (No response from RICHIE. Smiles, looks at his watch.) We’ve got to run. Quick—give me your phone number.

RICHIE: I’m in the book.

MATHEW: Well, we’re not. (Pulls out pamphlet. Writes his number on it, hands it to RICHIE.) Call you in the morning, Mary!

RICHIE: (Phone rings.) Next morning—(Phone rings again.) it’s ringing off the hook—(Rings again.) don’t answer it. How can I trust Barbara Stanwyck? All that bullshit about that hustler being his domestic partner. Who the fuck would marry an old queen like that? He’s pathetic. Reach into my pocket—pull out the pamphlet with his phone number on it—start to throw it in the trash—what? (Looks at pamphlet.) “Sex Addicts in Recovery”? (Reads from pamphlet.) “Why is it that a person who will not say hello to a stranger will have sex with that same stranger? Compulsive, anonymous sex is a desperate search for relief from loneliness and pain. It’s a narcotic that deadens our feelings—it’s a fix, like cocaine, alcohol . . . ” Jesus! What a line of bullshit. Throw the pamphlet in the trash—watch T.V. all day—fall asleep—(Jerks to sitting position.) wake up in the middle of the night. Polk Street—two in the morning—bars close—back and forth—three o’clock—back and forth—back and forth—this is one night I ain’t gonna pay for it—back and forth—back and forth—back and forth—four o’clock—sick and tired of cruising—move down the dim hallway to my room. See this tall, skinny guy with a big Adam’s apple—ain’t my type, but beggars can’t be choosers. (To “Skinny Guy.”) Hello, there! (Moves downstage to him.) Got a bottle of whiskey in my room. (To audience.) Push at the door of my room. He follows me in—get the pint from the dresser. (To “Skinny Guy.”) Uh—don’t have any glasses.

SKINNY GUY: You bin drinking out of that bottle, man?

RICHIE: Yeah. (To audience.) Grabs the bottle of whiskey—smashes it against the sink.

SKINNY GUY: (Advancing on RICHIE with broken bottle.) This dude don’t drink out of no bottle that some queer drank out of. Fuckin’ AIDS freak!

RICHIE: He stomps out the door. (Pantomimes closing the door and locking it. Hunches over in chair.) Can’t sleep. (Sees bruise on arm.) What’s this? Only a bruise—almost wish—if only I had the purple splotches—could end it all. (In total despair.) What the fuck—why not?

(Phone rings. It rings again. He runs away from it. On third ring, rushes over to it.) Barbara? Hello? Hello? (Hangs up. Hesitates.) Rummage through trash—find pamphlet with Barbara’s phone number. (Dials.) Uh—Barbara—I mean Mathew—it’s me. I know—haven’t been answering my phone. Sorry. Hey. Read the propaganda you gave me with your phone number on it. What? I mean—“Sex Addicts in Recovery”? What in hell is wrong with sex? Hell, it’s the only pleasure I get out of life. What? (Pause.) Can’t believe you—really? The former Barbara Stanwyck is—you are—really? You want me to go to a meeting with you? What the hell—why not? Haven’t been having any luck in the porno bookstores or the tearrooms, so—hey, maybe I can pick up a sexy guy at your

meeting. (Pause.) It's been done before? Uh—where? The Sharing Place? Across the street from the Strand on Market? Do I know where the Strand is? Are you kidding? How many times have I spent six hours on my knees in the back row—seven o'clock? Okay.

Long—long, narrow room. Two dozen men and women sit on folding chairs. Jesus—Donald and Mathew holding hands.

MURRAY: Good evening [says a tall, thin man]. (Reading from a binder.) Welcome to the seven o'clock meeting of Sex Addicts in Recovery. My name is Murray and I'm a sex addict.

RICHIE: Everyone says, "Hello, Murray."

MURRAY: We'll open the meeting with the Serenity Prayer, followed by the Preamble, the Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions, and the Promises.

RICHIE: Fall asleep during the Promises. Wake up when he says that the speaker for tonight is Mathew.

MATHEW: (Addressing the audience as the people at the meeting. His flamboyant self.) I'll start with my sweetheart of a mother. She had her own solution for life—(Pause.) a pill for everything! She was thrilled when she discovered blood in her stools—she was convinced she had cancer of the colon. However, when it turned out she had eaten beets the night before, she was near suicide with disappointment. Well, as for Daddy dearest—he was a real doll. When my nose was broken by a bully in school, Daddy hired this ex-fighter to teach me how to box. Well! Daddy got his jollies by watching the pug beat my face into a bloody pulp once a week.

RICHIE: Stop listening—shit—next he'll start crying about how he got raped by the hoboes in the boxcar—bet he loved every second of it. Start to leave when—wow! Sexy-looking stud comes in—massive football legs—nice basket—could fuck the bejeesus out of me—could—purple lesions?

MATHEW: Purple lesions. Yes. A-I-D-S [says Mathew]. AIDS. I couldn't cope with AIDS, so I said, "Goodbye, cruel world," and gulped down a handful of black beauties—woke up in S.F. General. This male nurse kept fussing over me—didn't mean much of anything to me when he told me he had AIDS. However, when he said what was important to him was the quality of his life—not how long he lived—well—it melted my mascara. He brought me here four years ago—I took the plunge—went into withdrawal from sex with strangers—sheer torture. This gal got in touch with feelings she didn't know she had—feelings she had stifled all her life—then—then I began to feel a mysterious power—some people call it God. I prefer to call it The Force, like in Star Wars. All my life I gave away my Force to men with faces like tombstones until I met Donald—right here—(Sees "Donald" in audience.) and, yes—love!

RICHIE: Jesus, Barbara, give me a break. You sound like Little Mary Sunshine. What are you gonna do when that Donald asshole rips you off like that hustler from Brooklyn did? Me—get the fuck outta this dump—need my hip boots to wade through the shit. A cult, nothin' but a fuckin' cult.

(Goes around chair twice.) Next six months—whirlpool of sex—on my way to a tearoom in the Tenderloin—(Stops dead in his tracks.) who do I see? Barbara and Donald—still together—still holding hands. (Rushes behind chair, uses it as a bar.) Rush into the Old Crow on Market. “Whiskey, bartender!” Shot after shot—after shot. (Drunk.) Young stud next to me—rubs his leg against mine. (Looks at “Young Stud.”) What the fuck—why not? (Staggers out of the bar with the “Young Stud” behind him. “Young Stud” hits him on the back of the head. Falls down. Finally sits up with his eyes closed. Grabs back of his head where he was hit. Opens his eyes. Sees pile of dog shit. Crawls away.) Jesus, a big pile of dog shit! Flies buzzing around it—in the fucking gutter where I belong! (Staggers to his feet. Frantically searches his pockets for his wallet. Screaming in pain.) How many times have I been rolled? (Desperately looks for a phone. Runs upstage, then downstage.) A phone—a phone—where’s a fuckin’ phone? (Phone to ear.) Barbara—Mathew—it’s—(Sobs—sobs—sobs—deep sobs.)

Mathew holds me—puts me to bed—fusses over me—takes care of me. Cry for two days—can’t stop crying. Is it because there’s no more porno bookstores to cruise? No more tearooms that stink of piss and shit? No more street corners where I can get busted? Yeah, nothing but—(Stands with his fists clenched.) “My name is Richie and I am a sex addict.” White-knuckle it for two months—whammo! Powie! Flat on my ass—my deathbed—AIDS! Finally caught up with me because I’m such a prick!

Call Mathew—tell him I’m sick—he rushes over. “I’ve got it at last. I’m burning up and I’m weak as a puppy.” Puts his hand on my forehead.

MATHEW: Mary, you don’t have a fever! Puh-lease, Richie. What you have are the symptoms of withdrawal from the drug of your choice—namely, king-sized cocks. Mary, I thought I was dying, too, when I stopped getting down on my knees in front of glory holes. (Sits. Looks at RICHIE.) You’ll have to ride it out. (Pause.) I’m here to stay. I’m not going to run off with some hustler like I did before. I promise.

RICHIE: Next morning my energy comes roaring back—but then a roller coaster of shame, fear, and guilt—towering anger that makes my head feel like it’s going to break wide open—what’s inside—thousands and thousands of cocks? (Makes a fist.) Richie-boy, all you ever think about is getting another fix—wake up in the middle of the night screaming from a nightmare I can’t remember—and the pain—deep—deep in my guts—will it ever go away?

Me—seven years old. (Hears the truck.) Putt-putt of truck turning into driveway. (Runs to the window and looks out.)

MIKEY: Jiggers [says Mikey]. If Daddy catches us up this late, he’ll skin us alive.

RICHIE: (Pantomimes, as “Mikey.”) He grabs the kerosene lamp—rushes into bedroom—Angie and me jump into bed with our clothes on. Mikey blows out the kerosene lamp. He pulls the dirty, gray sheet over our heads.

MIKEY: Act like you is sleepin’!

RICHIE: Footsteps like thunder—sound of breaking glass.

DADDY: Motherfuckers!

RICHIE: Daddy rips at the sheets.

DADDY: You're a blockhead, Mikey. Don't you know the lamp is hot? You and Angie—get your asses out to the barn. When I get out there, both of you better have your pants down around your ankles.

RICHIE: Me—sneak out to the back porch—get into the lead sink—watch as Daddy switches on the headlights of his truck—watch as he beats the daylights out of Mikey and Angie with his razor strop. Then he tells them they ain't crybabies—that they're chips off the old block. They giggle—pull up their overalls—rush into the house. Daddy slowly climbs the back steps—looks right at me, but don't see me.

When he was naked in the vat stompin' on the grapes, he talked to Mikey like I wasn't there. Then it hits me—(Pause as the realization sets in.) I don't exist—I'm invisible! Invisible! Invisible! Thousands and thousands of daddies over the years—macho daddies with towering rage in their eyes—in the pores of their skin—I can smell their hate. None of these daddies see me when I'm down on my knees in front of them—they stare blankly into space. One daddy looks at Playboy while I service him. How—how many years down on my knees—praying—praying—praying for my real daddy to see me so I won't be invisible anymore? How can Daddy see me? He's six feet under.

It's different now—(Moves downstage to imaginary mirror.) can actually see myself in the mirror. Two years go by, and—miracle of miracles—haven't been near a porno bookstore or a tearoom. Finally know that I can't get The Force by going down on a stranger—but most of all—ain't invisible no more—ain't invisible.

Shanti—me, a caretaker for people with AIDS. José, volunteer-trainer—(Looks into "José's" eyes.) something kind 'bout his dark brown eyes. One day, he says to me:

JOSÉ: You dance, Richie?

RICHIE: Uh—all I do is the two-step.

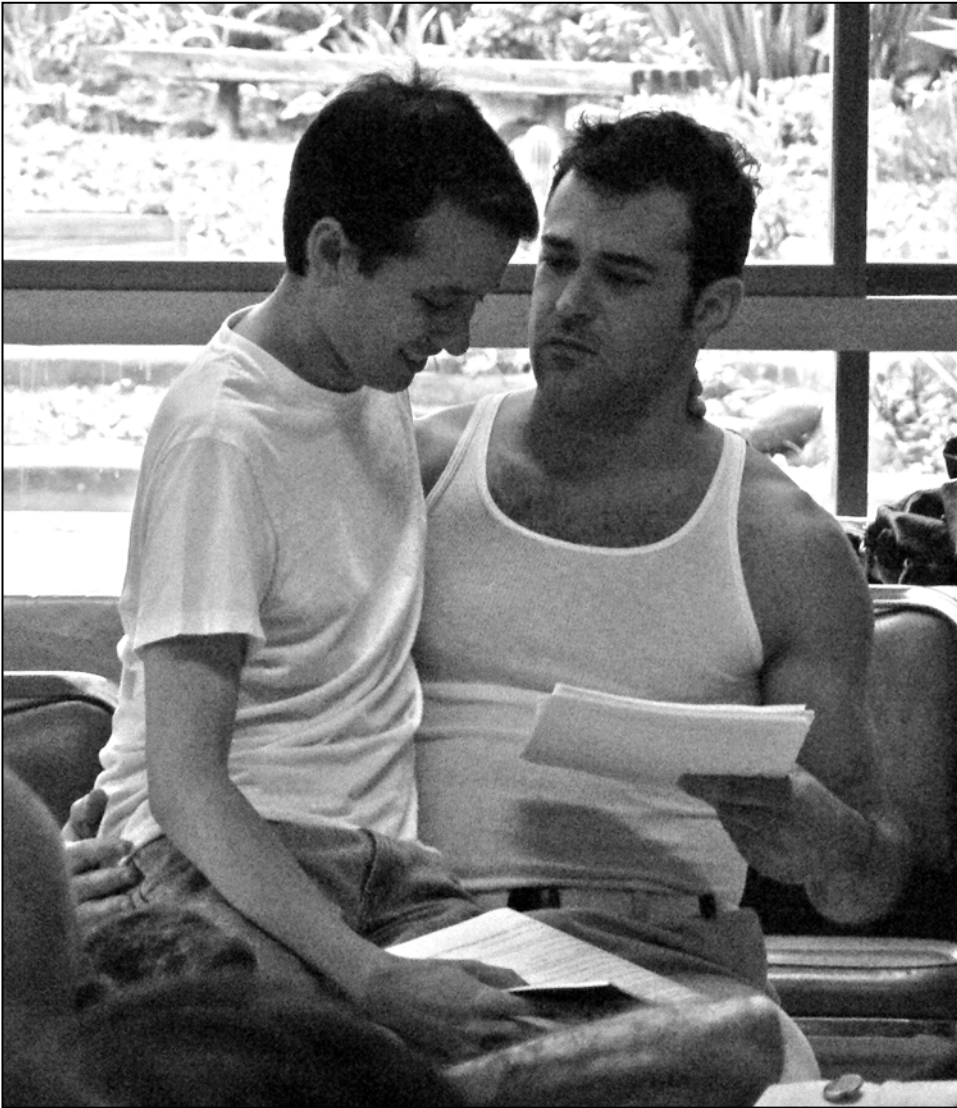
JOSÉ: Let's go to the Rawhide. I'll teach you how to square dance.

RICHIE: I, uh—well—I don't think—(Turns away, then finally looks at "José.") what the heck—why not?

JOSÉ: It's a date.

RICHIE: (Watches "José" leave. Terrified.) It's a—it's a date? A date? I've never been on a date in my life! When we were young, we didn't date. All we did was fuck. (Reaches into pocket. Pulls out condom.) Ah, here it is—just in case. (Examines it.) We used to call these "rubbers." Not that we're going to have sex on our first date, but—maybe—maybe I'll let him kiss me. (Exits slowly.)

CURTAIN



Ian Enriquez as Georgie and Michael Soldier as Mike in the 2006 staged reading of *Viagra Falls*.

Photo by James McColley Eilers

Viagra Falls

(2005)

A Play in Two Acts

“I enjoyed reading ‘*Viagra Falls*.’ It was very sexy in a twisted way that made me have erotic dreams all night after I finished it.”

Marshall W. Mason
Founder of Circle Repertory Company

Viagra Falls received a concert performance at La MaMa E.T.C. on
September 17, 2007 under the direction of Daniel Haben Clark

CHARACTERS:

OLD GEORGE, 82 A vibrant old man
GEORGIE, ages 7-30 A fucked up young man
MOM, 40 Loving but corrupt
MR. CLAXTON, 30 A social worker
MR. MILLER, 50 A sweet child molester
LIEUTENANT COMMANDER, 35 By the book
OFFICER MURPHY, 20s Loves his job on the vice squad
TRUCK DRIVER, 20 Homophobic working class guy
NANCY, 20 Georgie’s wife
MIKE, 31 Husky, cowboy personality
SALLY, 40 Sweet, in love with Georgie
TREVOR, 25 Handsome and pushy
NOTE: Mr. Claxton and the Lieutenant Commander played by same actor.
Vice Squad Guy and Trevor played by same actor.

Sally and Mr. Miller played by same actor.

Mike and Truck Driver played by same actor.

THE SET:

The flats are black, and they move in and out to frame each scene. There is a moveable platform that serves as a bed and as a platform. White square blocks serve as chairs and tables, etc. Power Point for projections.

ACT I

(We hear a 2005 popular song. OLD GEORGE enters. He uses a mahogany cane and has a slight limp.)

OLD GEORGE: (To audience.) Yewsta be when I woke up in the morning I'd reach for a cigarette with my eyes closed. When I finally opened them I'd curse the beginning of a new day. But now it's different. I jump out of bed, feed Sweetheart, my pussycat, meditate, then—(Kneels.) “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to—” the phone rings. (Puts receiver to ear.) “Hello?” (Whispers.) “Ooooh! Ooooh! George, I saw a picture of you in *Frontiers* magazine and I want to lick every part of your—” “Take it easy, honey.” I put down the receiver. (To audience.) I was a dashing seventy-eight when I competed in bodybuilding in the Gay Games in Sydney, Australia and my photo is all over the place. But—my story. I was seven years old when my beloved mother took Violet, my older sister, and ran off with this old geezer, Professor Henry Bossert—the old buzzard.

(Lights up on MOM and young GEORGIE. MOM plants a kiss on GEORGIE's forehead.)

GEORGIE: Mama, when I grow up I'm gonna buy you *A Dress Made of Diamonds*.

MOM: A kewpie doll kiss for my little angel sent to me by God. Don't worry, honey, your mother will come and get you as soon as—soon as she gets settled.

(MOM moves stage right, blows GEORGIE a kiss, and sits. Blackout on GEORGIE.)

OLD GEORGE: My drunk of a father gave a Commie speech in downtown Watsonville—“Workers of the World Unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!” (Pantomimes holding the fire hose.) The fire department turned on their hoses—(Makes sound of hoses.)—Daddy caught pneumonia in jail and died. Santa Cruz County sent me and my two brothers, Louie and Jackie, to a Catholic orphanage.

(OLD GEORGE sits stage right. Lights up on GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: (Sits in chair center stage.) After three years I get out of the orphanage. On the Greyhound—gonna live with my Auntie and Uncle in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania until Mom sends for me. Sit across from this good lookin blond guy. (Drools over him.) Gal with big bazooms sits next to him. (Scrunches down in his seat.) He's got her skirt above her knees—his hand between her legs. Her hand—it moves up his pant leg—she squeezes the big lump. She takes it out of his pants—looks like a big banana. She pulls on it like she's milkin a

cow. (Lights very bright.) Darn it—we pull into Tucson. (Rushes off the bus.) Rush to the lavatory—take out my peter and milk it. Ooooh! Ooooh! Ooooh!—All over the wall of the stall. What—what is it?—Milky white! (Touches the sperm on the wall. Puts finger to his nose. Sniffs.)—Smells like wallpaper paste.

(Spot up on OLD GEORGE.)

OLD GEORGE: (Smiling.) You better put it in your pants and get back on the bus before it leaves without you.

GEORGIE: Okey dokey!

(Blackout and lights up.)

GEORGIE: Live in a narrow room with Uncle George and Aunt Mary that's next to the railroad tracks. Black snow from the steel mills. Home relief gives Auntie four dollars and forty cents a week but Uncle George—(Looks at him.) "What's the matter with you? All you do is sit around and look at your stamp collection with your spyglass and let Auntie do all the work!" (Sits and writes.) I'm going to be an author. I write poems and short stories by the light of the gas jets up until two or three in the morning.

ANNOUNCER: 1937. President Roosevelt proposes a plan to enlarge the Supreme Court. New York City Police compile a list of all known sex degenerates. The shopping cart is invented. Georgie is fourteen.

GEORGIE: (Acting this out—shouting.) Get your paper—Press—Sun-Telegraph! (Gropes his way.) Grope my way down the dim hall that stinks of cabbage and cat piss—hand jerks me into a room. (Gets jerked into room. Looks down.) Holy cow—mouth like a fuckin furnace. (Closes his eyes.) Jesus God, I—Ooooh! Ooooh! (Plops down in chair.)—Pants down aroun' my ankles—man pulls up the shade—old—old and wrinkled. He kisses my peter. (Imitates the old man.) "You got a lot of spunk in ya, sonny!" Gives me four bits. (Stands up. Skips downstage.) Skip down the street on my way to Isaly's to buy me a rainbow ice cream cone. Wonder—what he done to me—is that gonna turn me into a queer? Can't help myself—(Rushes back to room.)—back to his room every other day—(Sits in chair.)—save up the moola—gonna put a dollar down on a layaway plan for a Zenith radio .

(Spot out on GEORGIE. Spot up on MOM.)

MOM: (Writing a letter.) Dearest Sister, My Daddy is a good provider. He bought a brand new Chrysler and paid cash—cash. I shouldn't tell you this but he has thousands and thousands of dollars in gold—in a suitcase under the bed. He is smart like a fox—he doesn't trust the banks. He says Father Coughlin and Adolf Hitler are saints—yes, saints—who will rid the world of the kikes who control all the money in the world. Enclosed is the Greyhound bus ticket and five dollars for food. After all these years I want my darling Georgie with me. He is not like his nasty brothers who threw rocks at me—they can stay in the orphanage. Please put him on the bus right away so he can come and live in luxury thanks to my wonderful professor—my Daddy. Love and kisses, Anna.

(Blackout. Bright lights up in Hollister. A table and two chairs. MOM sits at table. She is slicing an onion and crying. GEORGIE enters.)

MOM: Darling, I will fix you a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

GEORGIE: What's wrong, Mom?

MOM: (Smiles.) I'm peeling an onion for supper.

GEORGIE: Mama, let's get outta here.

MOM: What—what are you saying?

GEORGIE: Let's take Violet an' run away to Frisco.

MOM: Run away? Are you crazy?

GEORGIE: Then we kin be happy again like when I was little.

MOM: When we were starving to death? Like around your no-good father—he has the evil eye.

GEORGIE: I got four dollars from pickin turkeys.

MOM: Four dollars? (Laughs.) Sweetheart, you are still wet behind the ears. You don't know how the world works. (Waves the paring knife.) Grown men with college educations can't get a job digging a ditch. (Stands up.) We would be paupers if it wasn't for Daddy. He—

GEORGIE: The old buzzard ain't your daddy, for cryin out loud.

MOM: Daddy gives us this palace, and dresses Violet like a princess.

GEORGIE: The old buzzard—I hate him.

MOM: Daddy is a saint—a saint!

GEORGIE: (Bitter laugh.) Saints go to heaven. He ain't even goin to purgatory—

MOM: (Hands over ears.) Holy Mary, Mother of God. I—

GEORGIE: If he's such a damn saint how come he reads dirty magazines with naked gals, huh?

MOM: What—what are you saying? (Waves the knife.)

GEORGIE: He's got hundreds of 'em in his trunk—(Reaches into his trousers and takes out a garish Spicy Romance magazine.) This is what your saint reads! (Shoves the magazine in her face.)

MOM: (Covers her eyes.) You—you are just like your rotten—hoodlum brothers. Rocks! Rocks!

GEORGIE: But—but this—(Looks directly at the magazine.) Look at it, Mom! (Slams the pulp magazine down on the table.) But worser than this—he does nasty things to Violet.

MOM: Nasty? Nasty? (Places the knife on the table.)

GEORGIE: Why don' you face it? Your saint is screwin Violet. He's—

MOM: (Hands over her ears.) Holy Mary, Mother of God!

GEORGIE: It's the truth and you know it. The professor is—

MOM: Shut your filthy mouth. Shut—

(MOM swings at GEORGIE with her fist. He grabs her by the wrist.)

GEORGIE: If you ever try that again I'll—

(GEORGIE lets go of her wrist. MOM hits him on the mouth with her fist. He staggers. He starts to hit her but then he bangs his fist down on the kitchen

table. GEORGIE is crying in rage. MOM exits stage right screaming. GEORGIE exits stage left. A moment later he re-enters. Picks up *Spicy Romance* and exits stage left.

Blackout. Song—"Darn That Dream." Lights up on GEORGIE sitting at a table reading a story from *Torrid Romance* magazine and masturbating under the table.)

MOM: (Offstage.) Sweetheart?

(GEORGIE quickly buttons his fly. MOM enters. GEORGIE marks the page and closes the magazine. He makes no attempt to hide the lurid cover from his mother. She looks down at it.)

MOM: Doing your homework, sweetheart? (Pause.) A kewpie doll kiss for my precious angel. (Kisses GEORGIE on the cheek—moves towards the exit.) Wienies and sauerkraut for supper—Daddy's favorite! (Smiles at him and exits.)

(Spot slowly up on OLD GEORGE. He crosses to GEORGIE and massages his shoulders.)

OLD GEORGE: I know. I know.

GEORGIE: You can say that again.

OLD GEORGE: Have you thought of running away?

GEORGIE: Heck yeah—go up to San Jose, get a job in a cannery and then get Violet to come live with me, y'know?

OLD GEORGE: Well, you are sixteen—

GEORGIE: But—but the old buzzard—he's going to kick the bucket any minute and then Violet will be okay—an' Mom, she is gonna be like she used to be before she married him only she'll have lots and lots of money—

OLD GEORGE: I hate to tell you this but he's going to live for thirty-five more years.

GEORGIE: Really?

OLD GEORGE: It's time to go, Georgie.

(Blackout. Song—"Careless." Lights up on a desk and two chairs. It is the office of MR. CLAXTON, a social worker. OLD GEORGE is watching from stage right. MOM is watching from stage left.)

CLAXTON: (Big smile.) Come in, George. (GEORGIE enters.) Have a seat, son. (GEORGIE sits.) (Takes a Camel from the pack on his desk. Holds out the pack to GEORGIE.) Smoke?

(GEORGIE looks at OLD GEORGE. OLD GEORGE shakes his head.)

GEORGIE: Don' smoke.

OLD GEORGE: Sir!

CLAXTON: (Lights up.) Good boy. Wish—wish I never started.

GEORGIE: Uh—I don' like how they taste, sir.

CLAXTON: Bill Claxton. Call me Bill. So—(Leafs through folder.) Hmmm. Ran away from home but your parents don't want you back . . . Did you know they want you in reform school?

MOM: Darling, the professor is a saint—he would never put you in the reformatory.

GEORGIE: (Under his breath.) That's bull—(Puts his hand over his mouth.)

CLAXTON: What? What?

GEORGIE: Nothin, sir. .

CLAXTON: (Puts down folder.) You seem like a good kid—a good kid who tells the truth. (Taps his pencil on the tabletop.)

GEORGIE: I don' wanna go to hell, sir.

CLAXTON: We'll see about that. (Pause.) Tell me, boy, do you know a man who calls himself Dorvan?

GEORGIE: I know him, sir . . .

CLAXTON: Where did you meet him?

GEORGIE: St. James Park.

CLAXTON: What were you doing in St. James Park late at night?

GEORGIE: I jus' walk and walk and then—then I sit down for a minute or two, y'know?

CLAXTON: Do you know that St. James Park is full of degenerates?

GEORGIE: Huh? What's a de—?

CLAXTON: Degenerate! A sexual deviant—a morally degraded person—a fairy. (Pause.) Did Dorvan approach you?

GEORGIE: Uh—Dorvan? Uh—we jus' started talkin.

CLAXTON: About what?

OLD GEORGE: Algebra!

GEORGIE: (Confused.) Algebra?

CLAXTON: (Disbelief.) Algebra?

OLD GEORGE: He said he would help you with it.

GEORGIE: Uh—you see, I already flunked it twice, sir. I—

CLAXTON: (Disbelief.) He was going to help you with your algebra in St. James Park at midnight?

GEORGIE: I had my algebra books at home so he came over to—

CLAXTON: (Exasperated.) You—you expect me to believe this cock and bull story?

GEORGIE: It's the truth, sir.

CLAXTON: Did Dorvan run his hands over your body?

GEORGIE: Why would he do somethin like that, sir?

CLAXTON: (Angry.) Why don't you stop with the innocent act? If you're not careful you're gonna end up a pansy just like Dorvan, whose real name is Jim Collins. Your landlady got his license plate number and Mr. Collins is cooling his heels in the county jail. We want to put him away for good. You hear me?

GEORGIE: (Angry.) I ain't deaf, sir!

CLAXTON: If you don't want to go to reform school you better tell me the truth, boy.

GEORGIE: I am telling you the fu—the truth, sir!

CLAXTON: We know that queer son of a bitch did not come to your room to teach you algebra but to engage in a degenerate act. Did he touch you down below?

GEORGIE: Heck, I won't let nobody—(Crying.)—but nobody—do—do—somethin awful—jus' awful—like that to me. Something like that is—is—(Another burst of crying.)

CLAXTON: Alright! Alright! Stop blubbering. Here! (Hands GEORGIE his handkerchief. GEORGIE blows his nose—CLAXTON moves behind his desk. Frowns at the folder.)

OLD GEORGE: (Claps his hands.) Bravo! That was an Academy Award performance.

CLAXTON: Well! Well! Well! (Frowns at folder—shuffles some of the papers.) I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt. I'm sending you to Boys Ranch outside Watsonville. (Moves stage right.) Mr. Miller? Mr. Miller?

(MILLER enters.)

CLAXTON: (Hands MILLER the folder.) Boys Ranch.

(Blackout. Song—Guy Lombardo—"It Looks Like Rain in Cherry Blossom Lane."
Lights up on MILLER and GEORGIE. They sit in chairs next to each other.
MILLER is driving.)

MILLER: Can you—can you smell—smell the wonderful country air? I love to drive through the Santa Clara Valley in the spring.

GEORGIE: You a cop?

MILLER: (Smiles.) Heavens no. I do volunteer work for Bill Claxton.

GEORGIE: He's a damn hypocrite.

MILLER: He's a bachelor and, well, he doesn't—he knows nothing—nothing about children. Do you mind if I call you Georgie?

GEORGIE: Call me whatever you want to.

MILLER: Well, Georgie, I'm planning to go to Egypt and the Valley of the Queens to see the tomb of Nefertari, the favorite queen of Ramses II. And I definitely want to see the mummy of Tutankhamon, who died when he was only eighteen. I just happen to have—(Picks up the book.)—this book on Egyptology. The study of the culture and artifacts of the ancient Egyptian civilization. All of the drawings are taken from different tombs of the pharaohs.

(GEORGIE takes the book reluctantly. Then his gaze is riveted—he turns the pages rapidly.)

MILLER: Sabu in "The Thief of Baghdad" is playing in Gilroy. Would you like to see it?

GEORGIE: (Mesmerized by the book, continues to turn the pages.) Uh-huh.

MILLER: I have to make a few business calls. So—I will pick you up after the movies. It will be too late to take you to Boys Ranch, so—so we'll stay in a hotel.

GEORGIE: (Points to a picture in the book.) He's screwin her!

MILLER: One hundred and one positions for making love, Georgie.

(MILLER touches GEORGIE's leg. GEORGIE spreads his legs wide—an open invitation. Blackout. Spot on GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: Boys Ranch. (Puts his fingers over his nose.) I'm gonna sleep in a goddamn chicken coop? (Shovels.) I have to shovel tons of chicken shit to turn it into a dormitory.

MOM: Serves you right for running away from home where you lived in the lap of luxury!

GEORGIE: I get a job setting pins in a bowling alley in Watsonville when the Japs bomb Pearl Harbor. (Sticks out his thumb.) I hitch up to Frisco to join the Navy. Since I'm almost blind in this eye (Points to his left eye.) I memorize the eye chart! Boot camp in San Diego. Everything is fuck this—fuck that—fuck the goddamn Nazis—fuck the slant-eyed Japs. Five weeks later I'm on this train for the asshole of the Navy—Norfolk Virginia. (Salutes.) "Apprentice Seaman George Birimisa reporting for duty, sir!" I say to the Chief Petty Officer. "Is this my boat, sir?" "Ship! Ship! A fuckin ship! The Swanson is a fuckin ship—and you don' hafta fuckin salute a fuckin petty officer!"

(Lights out on GEORGIE. Song—"Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition.")

ANNOUNCER: At 0808 on Saturday October 24 1942 the Swanson got underway at the Naval Operating Base Norfolk Virginia and proceeded out to sea. Captain Markham informed the officers and men that they were bound for Casablanca in North Africa. Georgie is eighteen.

(Spot up on GEORGIE. He is in his bunk.)

.GEORGIE: When I turn over, my shoulder brushes the bunk above me. Wow! this gob—real dreamy lookin—he's jackin off like there ain't no tomorrow.

OLD GEORGE: Easy, Georgie. if you get caught fuckin around you could end up breaking rocks for the next twenty years.

GEORGIE: Gee! All I'm doing is lookin.

OLD GEORGE: Georgie, even that is not a good idea. (Laughs.) But that was great telling all your shipmates about the great piece of ass you got in that whorehouse and how she wants to give it to you for free the next time.

ANNOUNCER: The American armada after a voyage exceeding four thousand miles arrived at Casablanca North Africa on time. At 0445 the Swanson dropped anchor and the landing craft departed for Red Beach Two.

BOS'N'S MATE: (On loudspeaker.) Now hear this! Now hear this! General Quarters! Condition One! All hands man your battle stations.

GEORGIE: (On the bridge—pantomimes holding binoculars—searching sky for planes.) Jesus God—fuckin tracer shells—all different colors—they're beautiful but this ain't the Fourth of July! Wow! They're—(Jerks back.) landin closer and closer—the water splashes on me—we're hit! Naw! Just our five-inch guns blastin away at the shore batteries. But what—what—what the fuck am I doin here in the first place?—Fuckin Jesus—some guy is tryin to kill me an I didn't do nothin to him—I don' even know him! Oh my God. (Feels his pants.) I fuckin shit in my pants! (Laughs hysterically.)

(Blackout. Song. Lights up on the wardroom. The LIEUTENANT COMMANDER is seated behind desk. GEORGIE enters.)

GEORGIE: (Salutes.) Birimisa George, sir.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: At ease, sailor. Our first action—victory.

GEORGIE: (Pause.) How come we 're fighting the French instead of the Nazis, sir?

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: When Hitler conquered France he set up the puppet Vichy regime under Marshall Petain. Since Morocco is a colony of France, it was under the rule of the Vichy regime. Therefore, the French in North Africa were taking direct orders from the Third Reich.

GEORGIE: (Not seeing.) Oh, I see, sir.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: (Smiles.) Your gripe, sailor?

GEORGIE: Ain't nothin, sir.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: I don't—then why are you here?

GEORGIE: Gee, sir! I—better—

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: Answer my question!

GEORGIE: (Halting.) I'm a homosexual, sir.

MOM: You will burn in hell for all eternity!

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: Do you know the definition of the word?

GEORGIE: A pansy, sir

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: Hmmm. You don't look like a homosexual to me.

GEORGIE: (Brightens.) I don'? Really, sir?

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: Quite a few sailors have pretended to be homosexual so they could get out of the Navy.

GEORGIE: I wish I wasn't like this but it's the way I am, sir.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: All my information about homosexuality comes from textbooks. I've never met a real homosexual.

GEORGIE: Heck, I'm real, sir.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: Tell me—where do you meet the men of your, um—persuasion?

GEORGIE In parks—in toilets and movie houses. I like real rugged-lookin guys who ain't queer.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: If these men are not homosexual how can you have sex with them?

GEORGIE: I'm a substitute for a prostitute, sir.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: (Startled.) You're what?

GEORGIE: When a guy can't find a broad he lets me blow him but he won't let me go above his waist. No kissin or stuff like that.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: I see. Tell me about your homosexual experiences before you joined the Navy.

GEORGIE: Okay. There was Reverend James back in Pittsburgh.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: A minister?

GEORGIE: He browned me, an'—

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: Did what to you?

GEORGIE: Screwed me in the ass, sir.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: So tell me, Birimisa. How many sailors did you have sex with in boot camp?

OLD GEORGE: Take it easy, Georgie. He's trying to trap you!

GEORGIE: (Looks in the direction of OLD GEORGE.) None, sir

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: How many aboard the Swanson?

GEORGIE: Sir! I ain't done nothin yet but—we live in such close quarters—jus' to git by a sailor I rub up against him or he rubs up against me. Then this one sailor, sir—almost every time he goes by me he gooses me, sir.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: Gooses you?

GEORGIE: Grabs my ass, sir.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: A sailor aboard my ship does that?

GEORGIE: All the guys play grab-ass, sir. I'm a-scared. (Pause.) I'm a-scared that—heck, I know if I stay aboard that sooner or later I'll do it with some sailor an' then—I don' wanna end up with an Undesirable Discharge.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: If you continue to lie I will recommend that you receive a Summary Court Martial.

GEORGIE: Why would I lie about somethin as awful as bein a queer?

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER: (Shakes his head.) I'll have a yeoman draw up the papers as soon as we pull into the Brooklyn Navy Yard. You will be transferred to the Saint Albans Naval Hospital on Long Island. Dismissed!

(GEORGIE salutes. Blackout. Song—"They're Either Too Young or Too Old.")

GEORGIE: Saint Albans on Long Island. A locked ward with all the murderers and crazies—bars on the windows. Wow! Sammy—looks like Tyrone Power—my perfect type—after lights out I sneak over to his bed and give him a Baby Ruth. I can't help myself. My hand slips under the blanket—I barely touch his prick—he comes all over my hand. (Looks at his hand.) Next day I find out Sam shot his commanding officer in the head.

(Blackout. Song—"Paper Doll.")

GEORGIE: (Big grin—jumps up and down.) June 6 1943 I'm discharged from the Navy with a—would you believe? Honorable Conditions Discharge! I'm nineteen years old.

MAN: (Voice on microphone.) "Hey, Mac! How come you're 4-F? You look as healthy as a horse."

GEORGIE: "I'm the only survivor of an aircraft carrier that got sunk by a fuckin Nazi U-boat and my body is riddled with shrapnel." (Sticks out his thumb.) California, here I come, right back where I started from!

(Blackout. Song—"I'll Walk Alone." Lights up on OFFICER MURPHY leaning against a lamp post with his thumbs tucked into very tight blue jeans. He is well endowed. GEORGIE enters stage left. Spot up on OLD GEORGE seated stage right. MOM is stage left.)

MURPHY: Got a cigarette? (GEORGIE crosses, gives MURPHY a cigarette, lights it for him.) Fuckin hot.

GEORGIE: You kin say that again.

MURPHY: What time you got?

GEORGIE: (Looks at watch.) Ten after two.

MURPHY: Gotta kill two hours waitin for the damn Greyhound.

GEORGE: Where you headin?

MURPHY: Oxnard. So—what's cookin, Mac?

GEORGIE: Uh, nothin—nothin much. Just, uh—cruisin aroun'. (Stares at Murphy's crotch.)

MURPHY: (Quick look.) What are you cruisin aroun' for?

GEORGIE: I give you one guess.

MURPHY: You live around here?

GEORGIE Only a few blocks away.

MURPHY: (Gropes himself.) What—what do you do in the sack?

OLD GEORGE: Careful, Georgie. Could be vice squad.

GEORGIE: I'd like you to be top man.

(Flashing red lights off and on. In slow motion MURPHY hits GEORGIE in the nose and then in the belly. GEORGIE ends up flat on his face. MURPHY grabs GEORGIE's hair and bangs his head against the pavement. The screech of sirens.)

GEORGIE: (Screaming.) What the fuck did I do? What the fuck did I do?

(Blackout. Song—Bing Crosby—"Too-Ra-Loo-Ra-Loo-Ra.")

GEORGIE: (Looking around.) Fuckin courtroom. Am I really gonna defend myself? The D.A. calls Officer Murphy to the stand.

(Spot on MURPHY.)

MURPHY: I hate using filthy language, members of the jury, but I must report the exact words of the defendant. (Slowly, enunciating each word.) "I give great blow jobs but I prefer to get fucked in the ass by a big prick."

GEORGIE: He's a goddamn liar! I look at the jury. Twenty-four eyes stare at me like I came out of the nearest gutter. I take the stand. (To the jury.) See? I got bruises where he—(Points to MURPHY.)—hit me.

OLD GEORGE: "This is the first time I've been arrested an' I am not a homosexual."

GEORGIE: Uh—I am not a homosexual.

(Spot out on MURPHY.)

GEORGIE: (Intense anger.) It takes the jury fifteen minutes—yeah—fuckin guilty of lewd conduct in public—hundred dollar fine or ninety days in the jail an' I gotta register as a sex deviate—no fuckin way am I gonna do that. Stick out my thumb—(Intense anger.)—get the fuck outta the police state of Los Angeles!

(Lights out on GEORGIE. Song—"Candy." Lights up on GEORGIE and TRUCK DRIVER. Very hot, and the TRUCK DRIVER is shirtless. Very good looking. GEORGIE is mesmerized. They are in his truck.)

TRUCK DRIVER: I yewsta haul lettuce from Salinas down to L.A. I go through Hollywood two in the morning figurin to see Betty Grable or Ava Gardner but what do I see? I see me a bunch of queers standin in front of a hot dog stand.

GEORGIE: Uh, I bet the gals—I bet they fall all over you, huh? (GEORGIE pats the TRUCK DRIVER's leg.)

TRUCK DRIVER: Fall all over me?

GEORGIE: You know somethin'? (Feels his biceps.) You're so good lookin you kin be in the movies. You got the body of a, uh—like Superman.

TRUCK DRIVER: (Smoldering anger.) You wanna suck my dick?

GEORGIE: Huh? Why in the fuck would I wanna do that?

TRUCK DRIVER: Then stop actin like a fuckin fruit!

GEORGIE: (Lowering his voice.) Look, Mac. Ain't no fuckin queer. I get me all the pussy I want.

TRUCK DRIVER: (Grunts.) You know what we do to fairies back home? This tutti-frutti teacher—Lionel Goldberg. First time I seen him I know he's a fruitcake. He swings his lard ass aroun' like he wants a big dick shoved up it. Rick Lafferty, our star quarterback—this one night sleeps over at the fruit's house. The next morning Rick's drivin aroun' in the fruit's brand new Hudson convertible. When I talk to Rick he tells me that the fag is suckin his dick. So—a half dozen of us guys—we decide to fix the queer kike's wagon. Nobody—but nobody—blinks an eye when Lionel Goldberg don' show up for school the next day. (Laughs.) Every Fourth of July we go to this creek outside of town. We have a circle jerk around the hackberry tree. We wanna make the fruit happy. Fuckin A.

(Blackout.)

ANNOUNCER: 1947. Downed UFO believed to be found in the Roswell New Mexico UFO incident—Newsweek's Homosexuals in Uniform reports that between three thousand to four thousand homosexuals have been discharged from the military during World War Two with undesirable discharges. Georgie is twenty-three.

GEORGIE: Work as a bellhop at the Hotel New Weston—save up my money—quit—so I can spend full time on my writing—Jesus, it's like the breath is knocked out of me every time I get a fuckin rejection slip—I use them as toilet paper. Almost get run over when I'm reading Look Homeward Angel while I'm crossing the street. When my money runs out I go to work as a soda jerk at Howard Johnson's in the Village.

(The flats move in on NANCY's room. It is very small. NANCY is on the platform that serves as a bed. No furniture. A large pillow on the floor. There is a loud knock on the door. GEORGIE enters.)

NANCY: Welcome to the Lower Depths, Georgie.

GEORGIE: Uh—(Hands her a pack of cigarettes.)

NANCY: Thank you so much. I was about to have a nicotine fit.

GEORGIE: You havin woman trouble or somethin'?

NANCY: I think it's the influenza.

GEORGIE: Mr. Ellis was fit to be tied because you called in sick.

NANCY: Howard Johnson's can't do without their star cashier for one night.

GEORGIE: I'm sweatin like a pig because the air conditioner breaks down. The customers—three deep at the counter. This ole bag screams at me, "Boy! I want a coffee ice cream soda." "I ain't a boy, lady!"

NANCY: Good for you.

GEORGIE: Well, I better get goin. I—

NANCY: (Points to the pillow.) Stay for awhile.

GEORGIE: Well—(Finally sits on pillow—picks up book that is on the floor.) "Lie Down in Darkness"?

NANCY: The story of Peyton Loftis, who—

GEORGIE: A high class name for a guy, huh?

NANCY: Peyton Loftis is a girl.

GEORGIE: That's how much I know.

NANCY: It's about materialism in American society. The failure of parents to pass any values to their children.

GEORGIE: Y'know, Nancy, that book on Marx you gave me? I read *The Communist Manifesto* and—wow!—it opened my eyes to what's really goin on in the world. How the goddamn rich are makin sure that the poor stay poor.

NANCY: Well—that's capitalism for you.

(MOM takes out her rosary.)

GEORGIE: Truman, the murderer—gonna make the hydrogen bomb—twenty times stronger than the atomic bomb he dropped that killed two hundred thousand Japs.

NANCY: Japanese, Georgie. Jap is a derogatory word.

GEORGIE: It really pisses me off, y'know?

NANCY: (Nods her head.) Now he's getting ready to drop an atomic bomb on the Reds in North Korea. (Grabs her middle.) God damn it.

GEORGIE: What is it?

NANCY: It's, uh—my time of the month. (Pause.) I get the cramps real bad. That's why it's called—(Pause.)—the curse—the curse—(Rocks back and forth in pain.)

GEORGIE: Gee, is there somethin I—?

NANCY: I—(Pause.)—I just had an—an abortion.

GEORGIE: You—? You—an—abortion? Jesus, Nancy I—

NANCY: Miss Bessie up in Harlem

MOM: (Kisses rosary.) For all her high-falutin talk she's a tramp.

GEORGIE: I better take you to St. Vincent's.

NANCY: Miss Bessie is better'n any doctor.

GEORGIE: Well, uh—if you say so.

NANCY: It's all over—just the cramps.

GEORGIE: Are you sure you don't want me to take you—?

NANCY: There! (Touches her stomach.) Cramps all gone.

GEORGIE: Where's the guy who did this to you?

NANCY: Who knows? I've had dozens, and each and every one was the wrong one. I'm just like you, Georgie, boy crazy! When I was sixteen I ran away from home—stood in line all night so I could get into the Paramount to hear Frank Sinatra sing. Then I changed my name to Nancy—the name of his wife.

GEORGIE: What's your real name?

NANCY: Grace. I hate it.

GEORGIE: Gee! I can't believe—you—you a bobby soxer chasing after Sinatra?

NANCY: I've made such a mess of my life. I—(Sighs.)

GEORGIE: Well—I gotta git, uh—(Moves towards the exit.)

NANCY: Oh, Georgie, don't go. (Pause.) Please?

GEORGIE: Well, uh—(Hesitates, but then picks up the book.) I'll read until you go to sleep. (Sits and opens book.)

NANCY: (Pats the bed.)—There's plenty of room.

GEORGIE: Goodnight. (Reads for about ten seconds, then takes off his shoes, wiggles his toes. His socks have holes in them. Lies down next to Nancy.)

(Blackout. Song—"Buttons and Bows.")

GEORGIE: I get into a fight with my boss at Harriet Johnson's and quit. I'm three months back in my rent—get kicked out of my cold-water flat—move in with Nancy. Take her to see "Gentlemen's Agreement" on 42nd Street. Afterwards we go into this dive on Eighth Avenue and order fifteen-cent draught beers. When I see this husky sailor go into the head I follow him. When he finishes pissing he shakes his dick one too many times and leaves. "Let's take him home," I whisper to Nancy. We're barely in the door when he's down on his knees—muff diving on Nancy. I rip at the thirteen buttons of his sailor suit and go down on him. He shoves me away. I jack off as I watch him screwing the hell out of Nancy. Dawn is breaking when he finally leaves. We smoke a cigarette, cuddle, and go to sleep in each other's arms.

(Lights up on NANCY's room. NANCY is wearing an overcoat and is walking back and forth to keep warm. GEORGIE has a blanket over his shoulders.)

NANCY: My God, it's colder than a nun's tit in here.

GEORGIE: An' spring is—let's see—over three months away.

NANCY: Georgie, let's go to the land of oranges and movie stars.

GEORGIE: (Dubious.) L.A.? I'm not crazy about it.

NANCY: And—I'm fed up with the Big Apple.

GEORGIE: Nancy, what would we use for moola?

NANCY: Let me see—(Looks in her purse.) Uh—I've got thirty-one dollars.

GEORGIE: Shit, Nancy. We could only make it to Pittsburgh on the Greyhound.

NANCY: It would be lots of fun.

GEORGIE: It's fuckin ten degrees out there.

NANCY: Any colder than in here?

GEORGIE: Look, Nancy. I got stuck in the fuckin Mohave Desert for over twelve hours in one hundred ten heat. I almost croaked.

NANCY: (Stops rubbing her hands together from the cold—sticks out her thumb and pulls up her skirt.) No problem with our getting a ride, Georgie.

GEORGIE: Nancy, when they see me with you they won't stop.

NANCY: You can hide in the bushes.

GEORGIE: You really want to do this?

NANCY: It will be an adventure! C'mon, Georgie! (Heads for the closet.)

GEORGIE: What the fuck!

(Lights out on NANCY. Spot up on GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: It's down to the Holland Tunnel. Nancy sticks out her thumb. A bunch of rides—two days later we're in a hotel room in Memphis.

(Blackout. Song. Dim lights up on GEORGE and NANCY. They are sitting on the edge of the bed. NANCY kisses GEORGIE. OLD GEORGE is watching.)

NANCY: That was great, Georgie. I've been to bed with dozens of guys but it was always in the missionary position and it was all slam bam thank you ma'am.

GEORGIE: Gee! All I did was put your legs over my shoulders.

NANCY: You did much more than that.

GEORGIE: Nancy, do you think that maybe—maybe I ain't gay?

NANCY: Could be, Georgie.

GEORGIE: Y'know Nancy—walkin down the street with you on my arm I feel—well—I feel like a real man, y'know?

OLD GEORGIE: Georgie, you are a real man.

(Blackout. Lights up on GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: It's ride after ride until we hit downtown L.A. Nancy gets a job as a waitress at a greasy spoon. I stay home and write. We make love every night, and I'm convinced I'm not gay. Then—boom!—Nancy tells me she's shacking up with Joshua—a black dishwasher at work. Shit! Next time I try to make love to Nancy I can't get a hard-on. I go cruisin—pick up a Marine—go down on him in an alley.

(Blackout. Song—Perry Como—"Prisoner of Love." Lights up on GEORGIE and NANCY in their apartment. Both of them are reading.)

NANCY: Well, let me, uh—four months and a few days.

GEORGIE: Can you believe this? Two hundred thirteen Communists executed in Greece just for being Communists.

NANCY: Back to New York and Miss Bessie.

GEORGIE: What?

NANCY: You're not listening. I'm four months pregnant, Georgie.

GEORGIE: (Shocked.) You've got to be kidding!

NANCY: I'm deadly serious.

GEORGIE: Uh—you think it could be mine?

NANCY: It's either yours or Joshua's.

GEORGIE: He didn't use a rubber, huh?

NANCY: Well, neither did you.

GEORGIE: But I pulled out.

NANCY: So did he.

GEORGIE: What—what if we kept the baby?

NANCY: Would you help support it? (Pause.) I'm not going to support two babies.

GEORGIE: C'mon, Nancy. You're always putting me down. I'm sick and tired of
your—

NANCY: If you haven't noticed I've been supporting you since we got here, Georgie.

GEORGIE: Heck, you told me to stay home and write.

NANCY: I'm goin back to New York. Are you coming with me or not?

GEORGIE: Of course I'll come with you.

NANCY: Georgie, I—(Pause.)

GEORGIE: What?

NANCY: I'm so far gone that Miss Bessie might not perform the abortion.

GEORGIE: Really?

NANCY: I don't want my baby to be born a bastard.

GEORGIE: So?

NANCY: What do you say?

GEORGIE: (Hand to chest—surprised.) You, uh—you want me to marry you?

NANCY: (Bitterly.) That's the general idea.

GEORGIE: Gee! Me a married man?

MOM: (Jumps up—waves her hands.) Trash! He wants to marry trash! When I was
fourteen I was presented at the court of Franz Josef, Emperor of Austria and
King of Hungary!

OLD GEORGE: Just shut the fuck up!

(Blackout. Song—"Ghost Riders in the Sky.")

ANNOUNCER: 1949. Helen Keller is named in an FBI report as a member of the
Communist party—Pennsylvania—A young serviceman is arrested by the
Pittsburgh vice squad. Convicted of sodomy, he receives a sentence of fifteen to
thirty years. He spends nineteen years in prison. Georgie is twenty-five.

(Spot up on GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: (Typing away.) After Miss Bessie leaves with her pink bag Nancy lies
naked on the mattress reading "War and Peace"—waiting for the labor pains.
I'm typing away on the last chapter of my novel when a black cat jumps up on
the window sill—a kitten in her mouth—makes a beeline for the closet where
she deposits the kitten. In and out until five kittens are in the closet. When I
come near the closet with a saucer of milk she arches her back and hisses.

(Brighter spot on OLD GEORGE.)

OLD GEORGE: (Center stage—hand to forehead—very agitated.) My God I—never—ever told . . . It was two in the morning when Nancy cried, “Towels!” She lifted her legs and I spread the towels under her butt. Her belly heaved and there—head first—gush of purplish brown afterbirth. I—I felt like throwing up—a fully-formed baby. and—Jesus God—white—white—(Realization.)—my baby boy! “Get the scissors, Georgie!” Nancy cut the umbilical cord. I picked up my—my baby boy. Nancy sat up. “Is he alive?” I pressed my ear against his tiny chest. “No—no—heartbeat.” What—what do I do? What the fuck do I do? (Pause.) What—what if I flushed him down the toilet? (Pause.) I rushed into the bathroom—down on my knees in front of the toilet bowl. (Down on his knees—he looks at his open hand.) My God, he fits in the palm of my hand. His—his hands are fully formed. (Looks at his fingernails.) Tiny, tiny fingernails—toenails—perfect—he was perfect! I gently placed him in the toilet bowl. I—I pulled the chain. (Pulls the chain.) Jesus God, he was too large. The water—it swirled around, and his unseeing eyes looked up at me. (Trying not to cry.) I took him into the kitchen, deposited him in a Mason jar and shut the cupboard. The next morning I wrapped my baby boy in the New York Post, put him in a shopping bag and walked out the front door. Five minutes later I threw my baby boy into the East River.

(Blackout. Song—“How Much is That Doggie in the Window?” Lights up on NANCY and GEORGIE at the Brass Rail. They are sipping martinis.)

NANCY: Georgie, I’m moving to Chicago.

GEORGIE: You’re, uh—pulling my leg.

NANCY: “The fog comes on little cat feet. It sits looking over harbor and city on silent haunches and then moves on.” Carl Sandburg.

GEORGIE: So what does that have to do with Chicago?

NANCY: You have to read the entire poem, Georgie.

GEORGIE: Nancy, sometimes I wonder about you. I mean—

NANCY: I’m going to study with Bruno Bettelheim at the University of Chicago. He wrote this fabulous book—“The Informed Heart”—and it changed my life. It’s about how he survived in a concentration camp.

GEORGIE: You’d go there just for that?

NANCY: The University of Chicago is—well—world famous for the innovations that Robert Hutchins instituted. No grades—no lectures—only discussion and a lot of reading—it’s revolutionary.

GEORGIE: Gee, Nancy. The Big Apple is the place to be—not the boondocks of Chicago.

NANCY: Is that a no?

GEORGIE: Yeah—it’s a great big no. I’m sick and tired of following you around everywhere you go.

NANCY: Well, I’m catching the Trailways tonight at ten. (Waves her ticket.) See?

GEORGIE: Fuck, Nancy! There’s more to this than, uh—

NANCY: (Sarcastic.) I have half a dozen guys waiting for me in Chicago.

GEORGIE: For chrissakes, Nancy. You're always running away from yourself.

NANCY: Look who's talking.

GEORGIE: I don't want you to go.

NANCY: Sorry, Georgie! I'm going. In fact—

GEORGIE: You thinking of divorcing me, Nancy?

NANCY: The thought hadn't entered my head, but now that you've brought it up—

GEORGIE: You always got a wise remark, y'know?

NANCY: Yes, I do know.

GEORGIE: So go! Anyway, you're a fuckin pain in the ass!

NANCY: (Looks at watch.) Oh my God. I'll write you as soon as I get settled. (Kisses GEORGIE on the top of the head and exits.)

(Blackout. Song—"I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now." Spot up on GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: I finally finish my novel and take it to Dial Press. Six weeks later the fuckers send me a—Jesus Christ—another form rejection slip. I rush up to their office and demand to speak to the editor but he won't see me. One thing I know for sure—I'll kill myself before I spend the rest of my life working as a soda jerk.

(Spot up on NANCY. She is writing a letter to GEORGIE.)

NANCY: Dear Georgie—I met this brilliant emancipated woman before I left Chicago—Patricia Clark. She worked with Bettelheim in his clinic for troubled children. She has lots of boyfriends—she auditions them by screwing them. Patricia tells me that she can cure you of your homosexuality. She says it's having a mother who abandoned you and a weak father figure. This is your chance to be normal like everyone else.

(Spot out on NANCY. Song—Percy Faith—"My Heart Cries For You." Lights up on NANCY and GEORGIE. NANCY is seated behind a table and she is knitting. GEORGIE is pacing back and forth.)

NANCY: The Coney Island of the Pacific beats the hell out of the Village.

GEORGIE: You really like it here?

NANCY: (Nods her head.) Adore it. The Pacific is my swimming pool. But Patricia Clark—the lady I mentioned in my letter? (Rolls her eyes.) She—oh God!

GEORGIE: She's the one who said she could cure me of being a queer?

NANCY: This one time I came home from shopping, opened the door and there she was with her skirt up and Greg, her 17-year-old boyfriend was screwing her. She said, "He's the only philosophy major I've ever met who knows how to fuck." Just yesterday she took off with her boy wonder for San Francisco.

GEORGIE: Jesus! I came all the way out here to meet her, and now you tell me—? (Hits the palm of his hand with his fist.) Fuck!

NANCY: Temper! Temper! All I know is that she went there to join the Sufis. "Allahu akbar—God is great." Their Sufi poet Mevlana Rumi. "Come, come, whoever you are, wonderer, worshiper, lover of leaving, it doesn't matter, ours is not a caravan of despair. Though you have broken your vows a thousand times, come yet again, come, come."

GEORGE: Shit! I came out here for nothing! (Moves to exit.)

NANCY: Why don't you stay—at least for the night.

GEORGIE: (Stops.) Well—I guess it's better than sleepin on the beach.

NANCY: I'd like you to meet Ed.

GEORGIE: Ed?

NANCY: Ed Dvorak—Patricia's latest husband.

GEORGIE: He's stayin here?

NANCY: That Patricia—she talked me into moving out here to—well—she literally palmed off Ed Dvorak on me. (Stands up—obviously pregnant.)

GEORGIE: My God!

NANCY: Over six months and counting, Georgie.

GEORGIE: Wow! You're pregnant again? Jesus!

NANCY: I'm afraid Jesus had nothing to do with it.

GEORGIE: That's not funny. I'm getting the fuck out of here. (Bitterly, as he exits.)
I'll see you in hell!

(Blackout. Song—Frankie Laine—"Black and Blue" or "Mule Train." Lights up on
GEORGIE—very dim.)

GEORGIE: I head for this scuzzy bar across from a cemetery on Santa Monica Boulevard. I push at the leather curtain. A chubby leather queen minces up to me, holds out an empty bottle. "Sir, would you fill this up with your golden stream?" "Get the fuck away from me!" I feel a calm, steady hatred for everyone in the dive. Nothing but a bunch of queers dressed up in leather trying to act like real men when most of them are pencil pushers or hairdressers. Then—then I see him.

(Spot up on MIKE. A Superman body—silver flecks in his dark brown hair. Tight leather pants—a leather vest that shows off his large biceps with a tattoo of a green boa constrictor wrapped around a black panther. GEORGIE crosses to him.)

GEORGIE: Hi, I'm Georgie. (No answer.)—How's it goin?

MIKE: Mmmm.

GEORGIE: Can I buy you a beer? (MIKE shakes his head.)—Gee, your tattoo, it's—I really like it.

(MIKE flexes his right arm—the tattoo moves. He finally looks at GEORGIE.)

MIKE: Which one is going to win—the panther or the snake?

GEORGIE: The panther?

MIKE: The snake always wins.

GEORGIE: Heck. (Gulps.)—You really tie me up, y'know?

MIKE: I'd love to tie you up—whip your butt.

GEORGIE: Whip my—I don't go in for that kind of shit.

MIKE: (Smiles.) You don't?

GEORGIE: Hell no I don't!

MIKE: A virgin. (Holds out his hand.) Mike Sands. (They shake hands. Arrogant grin.) New York City. (Grabs GEORGIE by the front of his T-shirt—pulls him to within an inch of his face—a hypnotic stare.)—Canal 3-4455. (Twists GEORGIE's tit and then slaps his butt really hard—exits.)

GEORGIE: (Pause—fingertips to forehead.) Canal 3-4455.
(Blackout. Song—"Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered.")

CURTAIN

ACT II

(Spot up on GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: Long distance, please. Operator? Canal 3-4455 in New York City. (Spot up on MIKE.)

MIKE: Yeah?

GEORGIE: This is Georgie and we met—

MIKE: You're the guy from L.A. with the virgin butt.

GEORGIE: (Lamely.) I ain't interested in—

MIKE: I've been waiting for your call.

GEORGIE: (Shocked.) You've been what?

MIKE: I spotted you right away, Georgie. Your hungry eyes—looking for a Daddy to give you a big lollipop to suck on when you're a good boy and spanking you when you're bad.

GEORGIE: Mac, the only reason I'm calling is because I'm a writer.

MIKE: Get a tattoo on your left biceps. A black panther with blood on its claws. No snake. Then you can move in with me.

(Blackout. Song—Johnny Cash—"Home of the Blues." Lights up on MIKE's apartment in New York City. A telephone. A black doctor's bag. MOM is stage right. OLD GEORGE is stage left.

GEORGIE sits up in bed He stretches and yawns. He is in his jockey shorts. We see the tattoo of the black panther on his left biceps. He goes downstage and looks in fourth wall mirror at the hickey marks on his neck. He touches them lovingly. Then he turns around. We see the whip lashes on his butt and back—black and blue. The phone rings.)

MIKE: (Offstage.) Answer the phone, Georgie.

GEORGIE: (Picks up phone.) Hello? (Pause.) Jesus, lady, you got the wrong number. Ain't no Marvin here! (GEORGIE slams down the phone. MIKE enters. He is naked and he is drying his hair with a towel.)

MIKE: Who was it?

GEORGIE: Uh—(Distracted by MIKE's body.) Oh, some dumb gal. She was askin for—some guy with a stupid name.

MIKE: Marvin?

GEORGIE: Yeah, that's it.

MIKE: I'm Marvin.

GEORGIE: (Makes a face.) You got to be kidding!

MIKE: That was my mom in Philly.

GEORGIE: Every Marvin I ever met was a fuckin sissy.

MIKE: Dr. Marvin S. Samuels.

GEORGIE: You're a real doctor?

MIKE: Don't ever call me Marvin. I'm Mike Sands.

GEORGIE: What kind of a doctor are you?

MIKE: Ophthalmologist.

GEORGIE: Ophthal—what?

MIKE: Eye surgeon.

GEORGIE: Jesus. (Disappointed.) I figured you were a construction worker or—

MIKE: I'm in my residency at the V.A. Hospital in Brooklyn.

GEORGIE: Gee! My eye—(Points to his left eye.) Y'know, I'm almost blind in this eye but what really bothers me is—it's cockeyed.

(MIKE takes ophthalmoscope from medical bag, examines GEORGIE's eye.)

MIKE: Extropia and/or strabismus. The eyes are unable to focus simultaneously on a single point. That can be fixed easily, Georgie. I'll schedule you at the V.A.

GEORGIE: Gee! You're gonna operate on me?

MIKE: (Nods his head.) Turn around.

(GEORGIE turns around. MIKE pulls down GEORGIE's shorts and kisses his butt. Gets ointment from his black bag. Gently rubs ointment on GEORGIE's back and butt.)

MIKE: You've got thick skin, Georgie.

GEORGIE: Are there gonna be any permanent scars?

MIKE: They'll be gone in a couple of days.

GEORGIE: (Disappointed.) Oh.

MIKE: (Grins.) Don't worry, Georgie, I'll give you plenty of scars to remember me by.

GEORGIE: Gee, Marvin, I—

MIKE: (Slaps GEORGIE.) Mike Sands.

(GEORGIE clenches his fists as if to hit MIKE. Bites his lip to hold back the tears.)

GEORGIE: (A whisper.) Mike Sands.

MIKE: I can't hear you!

GEORGIE: (Loud.) Mike Sands!

MOM: What did you expect, a kewpie doll kiss?

(Blackout. Song. Lights up on MIKE's apartment. GEORGIE is seated at table typing on his novel. He is in his jockey underwear. OLD GEORGE is watching. MIKE is

on the phone. He is dressed in very tight blue jeans and a tight polo shirt. He has a rubber ball in his hand. He opens and shuts his hand around it.)

MIKE: Mmmm. (Hangs up—moves to exit.)

GEORGIE: Where you off to?

MIKE: The V.A.

GEORGIE: You should be wearing a shirt and tie.

MIKE: You're telling me what to do?

GEORGIE: No, I'm telling you what you should do.

MIKE: Do I look queer to you?

GEORGIE: Of course you don', but—

MIKE: Catch! (Throws the rubber ball at GEORGIE. GEORGIE catches it. MIKE exits.)

GEORGIE: (Reads what he has written.) Daddy was only forty-seven years old but he was stoop shouldered and getting bald—an angry man who lost all of his teeth and all of his dreams. Us boys would steal watermelons from the corner so he could have something soft to chew on—(Pause.)—to eat? When Mom—when Mother ran off with the professor she said to Violet, "I'm a Judas, I sold my boys for thirty pieces of silver."

(The phone rings. GEORGIE picks it up.)

GEORGIE: Hello?

SHILLER: (Voice on microphone.) Shiller here, I forgot to tell you to pick up a bottle of vodka—

GEORGIE: This ain't Mike. He's—

SHILLER: I'm hot to trot so get that cute ass of yours over here right now.

GEORGIE: (Angry.) What the fuck?

(GEORGIE slams down the phone.)

GEORGIE: Jesus, Mike, I—(Goes back to his typewriter. Stares at the page. The phone rings. GEORGIE picks it up.) Yeah?

SHILLER: How old are you?

GEORGIE: (Angry.) I'm fuckin eighty years old and I got fuckin false teeth!

SHILLER: I bet you give a great gum job.

(GEORGIE slams down the receiver. Goes back to typewriter. Blackout. A few bars of a song. Lights up on GEORGIE. He is typing furiously as MIKE enters.)

GEORGIE: (Very angry and hurt.) One of your fuckin boyfriends called right after you left.

MIKE: I don't have any boyfriends.

GEORGIE: What about Shiller?

MIKE: He's a john.

GEORGIE: A john?

MIKE: You don't know what a john is?

GEORGIE: Of course I know what a fuckin john is.

MIKE: Twenty-five bucks for less than an hour.

GEORGIE: (Shocked.) You mean you get paid—?

MIKE: (Sarcastic.) No, I pay them.

GEORGIE: But—Jesus, Mike, you're a doctor, you shouldn't be fuckin around with shit like that.

MIKE: I'm in my residency. My salary barely pays the rent.

GEORGIE: Mike, just the thought of you with someone—

MIKE: You're getting to be a pain in the ass.

(Blackout. Song—"Make My Bed in Hell" or "Great Balls of Fire." Lights up on SALLY's apartment. A six foot high screen covered with very large pictures of movie stars: Janet Gaynor—Theda Bara—Frances Farmer. A black notebook on table. An Oriental vase filled with peacock feathers. There is the sound of the doorbell.)

SALLY: (Behind the screen.) Come in, ladies! Make yourselves comfy.

(MIKE and GEORGIE enter.)

MIKE: Hello, Salvatore!

SALLY: (Still behind screen.) Sally, the mother of all the friends of Dorothy, is stepping into her step-ins—uh-huh! A dollop of Max Factor pancake, and—

MIKE: You can't hide your sagging flesh, you old bag!

(SALLY appears from behind the screen. He is in his forties and a little frayed around the edges. He is wearing a beautiful, colorful kimono.)

SALLY: (To MIKE.) Sally says you are as brutally sexy as ever. (Turns to GEORGIE.) So—you must be Georgie. Your taste is fantabulous, Marvin.

MIKE: Mike!

SALLY: Puh—lease. (Points to MIKE.) Dear me, Sally barely had time to douche after her last troll. (Puts a cigarette in the holder.)

MIKE: Georgie, I bet Salvatore uses a fire hose for that Grand Canyon of his.

SALLY: Hers! Now, Miss Tiny Meat! (Wiggles his smallest finger.) Congratulations, Georgie, you snagged yourself a nice Jewish doctah. Tell mother—is it true you took the Greyhound as far as Texarkana and hitched the rest of the way just to be with Missy Marvinina?

GEORGIE: Calling Mike names like that isn't funny. It's fuckin childish—especially from an old fart like you.

SALLY: (Hand to chest.) I absolutely adore your rough trade attitude—so sexy.

GEORGIE: I was sick and tired of L.A.—that's why I hitched here. No people there—nothin but cars, smog, and the fuckin Gestapo. Step off the curb on a red light and you can end up in the hoosegow.

SALLY: (Sings mockingly.) "Love is a many-splendored thing. It's the April rose that only grows in the early spring."

MIKE: (Puts his hands over his ears.) You sound like Kate Smith.

SALLY: Sally absolutely worships her. When she was pre-pubescent she devoutly listened to the Kate Smith Hour. (Sings.) God bless America—land that I cruise—from the mountains—to the fairies—to the—

MIKE: Shut the fuck up!

SALLY: Only on the condition that you give Sally her Miltown and her barbiturates. (MIKE hands him a plastic bag.) How much does this old auntie owe you, toots?

MIKE: They're samples.

SALLY: That's so—so sweet of you. (Tries to kiss MIKE but MIKE pushes him away.)

MIKE: Alcohol does not go well with dexamphetamine sulfate.

SALLY: Under that butch exterior of the good doctor lies a—a lady. (Turns to GEORGIE.) I understand you're working at an ice cream emporium in the Village!

GEORGE: Only temporary until I finish my novel.

SALLY: Tell me—do you make hot fudge sundaes?

GEORGIE: All kinds of shit like that.

SALLY: (Closes his eyes.) I adore hot fudge sundaes—much better than sex! Sinful! (Pause. He declaims.) "Sin was yet very sweet to my flesh, and I was loath to leave it." (Pause.) But, oh, I must go on a crash diet before I fly to Dallas.

MIKE: What's up in Dallas?

SALLY: (Insinuating.) Billy Joe is up in Dallas—uh-huh! When he's up he's one of the seven wonders of the world. Oh my God. My poor hemorrhoids are ingrown from his Texas longhorn. Let me tell you, ladies, Billy Joe was living in conjugal bliss with his wife of thirty years, but one day he picked up a gorgeous Mexican wetback and the next thing he knew his head was buried in the young man's crotch. Yes, at fifty-five Billy Joe finally faced the fact he was as gay as a goose. As soon as he gets his divorce Sally here is moving to Dallas to live in splendor with her Texas longhorn.

MIKE: You won't last a month in Texas.

(The phone rings. SALLY picks it up.)

SALLY: Yes? (Pause.) I do have Mario on call. He's twenty-one, built like Mr. America and is seven inches, but thick—thick. (Pause.) Uh-huh, the usual fee. (Gushing.) You want li'l ole Mother here? The Shelton at noon. (Hangs up.)

MIKE: Isn't it about time you retired?

SALLY: This grand dame has a few good years left.

MIKE: You keep all the rich johns for yourself.

SALLY: You ungrateful wench! I gave you Noel Coward.

MIKE: But you kept Rock Hudson.

SALLY: He's all yours the next time he's in our grand cesspool. (Moves to GEORGIE.) About your Lord High Executioner? I fixed her up with my wealthiest client, Richard Lion Gardener. He happens to own half of Long Island. His ancestors came over on the Mayflower. To Miss Richard Lion Gardener the Vanderbilts and the Rockefellers are nouveau riche.

MIKE: He was a miser!

GEORGIE: All rich people worship money and that's why they're so stingy.

MIKE: My Commie slave speaks his propaganda!

(The phone rings.)

SALLY: (Picks up phone.) Hello? (His voice changes. Sweet.) Oh, Billy—Billy Joe, I've been sitting here waiting for your call. I'm knitting you a sweater, dear heart. Of course—I promised you, did I not? I am no longer in that wretched business—my heart belongs to Dad—oops—to you, uh-huh. Yes, Flight 392 from LaGuardia. Oh, my chicken saffron bouillabaisse is burning—I absolutely adore you, Billy Joe. (Makes kissing sounds.) Bye! (Puts down phone.) He's sending a town car to pick me up. I wonder if his chauffeur has a long horn?

MIKE: Salvatore's a size queen.

SALLY: Hah! Look who's talking.

MIKE: (To GEORGIE.) Time for you to drop your pants. Let Sally have a look.

MOM: I sang God Bless America when I was on the train in Tito's Yugoslavia that was full of degenerates and Communists like you, Georgie!

GEORGIE: What the hell!

(GEORGIE is facing upstage. He drops his pants and underwear. MIKE slaps him hard on his bare butt.)

SALLY: (Looking down. Pause.) The Resurrection! Thank God I only like vanilla sex. Hmmm. Where on earth did I put my measuring tape?

(The phone rings. SALLY picks it up. GEORGIE pulls up his pants.)

SALLY: Hello? (Pause.) Uh-huh. I see. Well, he happens to be—(Hands the phone to MIKE.)

MIKE: The Sherry Netherland? 1436. Gotcha!

(MIKE exits without a word.)

SALLY: I'll miss his sparkling repartee. Mike tells me you used to hustle 42nd Street.

GEORGIE: (Angry.) All I did was let them blow me—pretend I'm straight. Most of 'em wanted to hear stories about the gals I said I fucked.

SALLY: You're not ambidextrous with men?

GEORGIE: Hell, I did go down on this one old fart but never—never again. He had a potbelly and he smelled to high heaven—paid me a lousy five bucks.

SALLY: Quite a few of my clients adore rough trade, but the majority of them are size queens and you—well—(Makes a face.)

GEORGIE: My dick is six inches.

SALLY: Well, Mary, I—

GEORGIE: Don't call me Mary. My name is Georgie.

SALLY: (Takes black book from pocket of his kimono.) Well, Georgie—Let me—here—Jonathan Jaspers—maybe he's back from the Himalayas—he's good for thirty. I'll—

GEORGIE: You know Mike for a long time?

SALLY: I met Mike—it was a few days after D-Day. We shared living quarters for about six weeks and I must say he was impossible to live with. Well, this John Titus. We called him Tight Ass. He watched from behind the shower curtain while I invaded Marvin's posterior on the bathroom floor. Marvin can't resist my rather large, thick phallus.

GEORGIE: (Upset.) You're tellin me that a nellie queen like you fucked Mike?

SALLY: (Laughs.) Well, it was when I was in my mesomorph period.

GEORGIE: Mike ain't like that. He doesn't get fucked. He's always the top man.

SALLY: (Rolls his eyes.) If you say so, my dear—oops, Georgie. (Looks at his watch.) Heavens! This fantabulous double bill at the Thalia. Delicious Marlene in "The Blue Angel" and "Destry Rides Again." Then we'll have dinner. My treat. (Sings—imitating Dietrich.) "Falling in love again. Never wanted to. What am I to do? Can't help it."

(Blackout. Song—Elvis Presley—"Don't Be Cruel." MIKE's apartment. GEORGIE is at his typewriter. MIKE enters with attaché case. He is dressed in a suit and tie. He is upset.)

GEORGIE: Hi, honey! Didja hear? A Soviet missile just shot down the U.S.'s U-2 spy plane and on top of that they captured the pilot—let's see—Cary or Gary Powers. What the hell are we doing flying over Russia in the first place? If it was the other way around we would blast the U.S.S.R. off the face of the map. We would—

MIKE: Fuck! Fuck! Where are my—(Pats his body.)—my Kents?

GEORGIE: Oh! (Gives MIKE a cigarette and starts to light it for him but MIKE grabs the matches out of his hand and lights it. GEORGIE gets ashtray.)

MIKE: He—he was right there watching the whole scene—he—he—(Pause.)

GEORGIE: What the fuck you talkin about?

MIKE: That prick Dr. Capricia! He was green with envy because my patient—Mr. Ryan—glaucoma in both eyes. I operated on him using a risky technique. Well, I tested his eyes and they eventually will be twenty-twenty. Mrs. Ryan said my hands were a gift from God. A gift of God!

GEORGIE: That's great. I always knew that—

MIKE: Right after the Ryan's left Dr. Capricia lowered the boom on me. The prick said he got a letter that says I'm a homosexual.

GEORGIE: Oh my God! Did he say who it was from?

MIKE: He said it was anonymous.

GEORGIE: He showed it to you?

MIKE: No way.

GEORGIE: Maybe the fucker's not showing it to you because there ain't a letter.

MIKE: Then how in hell would he know that I'm, uh—?

GEORGIE: It could be because you're not married and you're livin with me.

MIKE: Nobody knows you're here.

GEORGIE: Look, when I was at the V.A. for my eye—this one mousy looking nurse—I heard you tell her that I was your roommate.

MIKE: That fuck Capricia says if I resign he'll destroy the letter and that will be the end of it.

GEORGIE: And if you don't resign?

MIKE: I'll be fired.

GEORGIE: Mike, he's not gonna fire you because of some stupid anonymous letter.

MIKE: When was it—sometime last month—I was assisting Capricia on a simple decision procedure. I could smell the booze on his breath, and his hands—they were shaking. I offered to take over but he said, "No thank you, Marvie-boy!" Then he botched the operation. The patient ended up with an occlusion.

GEORGIE: What's that?

MIKE: Removal of the eye. The son of a bitch knows that I know he's a butcher.

GEORGIE: What a bunch of fuckin hypocrites! Honey, I know nothin is gonna happen, but say that it did—will you still be able to practice medicine?

MIKE: As a lousy G.P. spending my life prescribing two aspirin and bed rest. I'm nine months away from my dream—becoming a certified eye surgeon, but—but—(Pause.) I'm going to resign.

GEORGIE: You'd be crazy to, Mike. The bastard is bluffing. If there's a letter why didn't he show it to you?

MIKE: I didn't think of that. (GEORGIE takes his hand.)

(Blackout. Song—Connie Francis—"My Heart Has a Mind of Its Own." Spot up on SALLY as he dials. Spot up on GEORGIE as he picks up phone.)

SALLY: It's me, dear heart. I've got this john who pays thirty for rough trade. However, your tookus—does it have any visible black and blue marks?

GEORGIE: Tookus—what—?

SALLY: That beautiful derriere of yours.

GEORGIE: I don't see what—?

SALLY: Mr. Shropshire is not interested in a masochist.

GEORGIE: When, Sally?

SALLY: He's at the Waldorf and he is impatiently waiting.

GEORGIE: Look, I can't. Mike will be home in a few minutes. So how was your trip to Dallas?

SALLY: Billy Joe not only has a Morgan and a Rolls—his mansion makes Scarlett's Tara look like a tumble-down shack. He loves to lift his leg and fart up a storm. He has a flunky who sprays the room after he lets go with one of his firecrackers. Everything was copacetic until he drove me to the airport. By the time we got there I was snookered out of my skull from the bar in the Rolls Royce. Well, we staggered into the cocktail lounge. That's when I saw this Air Force pilot in his devastating powder-blue uniform that was only matched by his sky-blue eyes. When this God from Mt. Olympus went to the pissoir this old queen couldn't resist. Well, Billy Joe caught me going down on this gorgeous

piece of trade just as he was ejecting his magic fluids into my mouth—well—and that—that was the end of Billy Joe and my trust fund.

GEORGIE: (Smiling.) Come the revolution you won't need a trust fund.

SALLY: Come the revolution all friends of Dorothy will be in concentration camps.

GEORGIE: Look, we got concentration camps right here and now.

SALLY: Spare me your simplistic politics. (Pause.) Are you positive you don't want Mr. Shropshire's liver lips around your short arm?—(GEORGIE hangs up.)

(Blackout. Song—Elvis Presley—"All Shook Up." Lights up on MIKE's apartment.

GEORGIE is in his underwear doing push-ups when MIKE enters.)

GEORGIE: Hi! Gee, you're home early.

MIKE: The other—the other shoe dropped. (Paces back and forth. Takes out his rubber ball and squeezes it.) Dr. Capricia. The son of a—another—another anonymous letter.

GEORGIE: Oh, fuck!

MIKE: A picture of me in a leather jockstrap holding a cat o' nine tails.

GEORGIE: Jesus, Mike, you let someone take a picture of you like that?

MIKE: All the letter said was—"The enclosed snapshot is of Dr. Marvin Samuels, alias Mike Sands, in all his sadistic glory." Said if I didn't resign he would notify the A.M.A. and the police.

GEORGIE: Shit! Shit! Shit!

MIKE: It's over and done with. He had me by the short hairs so I gave him my resignation.

GEORGIE: That miserable son of a bitch.

MIKE: If Mother—if it wasn't for her I'd fight the bastard, but—but it would kill her.

GEORGIE: Gee, honey, I'm so sorry, y'know?

MIKE: (Suddenly contrite.) Babe I'm not the easiest person to live with, but—(Pause.)—I want you to know—no matter what I say or what I do to you—don't—don't ever leave me.

GEORGIE: (Pause.) Me leave you?

MIKE: (Shaking GEORGIE's shoulders.) Promise me!

GEORGIE: Jesus, don't you know how much I love you?

MIKE: I said promise me.

GEORGIE: (To MIKE.) I promise, honey. I promise!

MIKE: You promise what?

GEORGIE: I promise I will never leave you.

(MIKE kisses GEORGIE passionately.)

MOM: (Stands up. Lifts her skirt.) Georgie, look at my legs—look how hard they are—they are like iron.

(Blackout. Song—The Drifters—"There Goes My Baby." Spot up on GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: (Pacing back and forth—back and forth. Sits in front of typewriter and reads what he has written.) Mom hides behind the Morton salt billboard Daddy

rushes out of the house with me over his head. He throws me in the general direction of the billboard. "Take your little sissy with you, you fuckin cunt!" (Thinking out loud.) Gee! What can I use instead of cunt? Pussy? How about prick-teaser? "You fuckin prick-teaser." Can I get away with that? Hey! Twat! "Take your little sissy with you, you fuckin twat!" Naw—it's got to be cunt.

(Blackout.)

ANNOUNCER: 1961. U.C. Berkeley Professor Parkinson murdered. The reason given by the killer: "He was a homosexual and a Communist"—U.S. B-52 bomber with two 24-megaton nuclear bombs crashes in North Carolina—The muscle magazine *Strength and Health* attacks "those dirty queer magazines." Georgie is thirty-seven.

(Spot up on GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: (To the audience.) Then the miracle happens. The V.A. accepts Mike's resignation—they give him a certificate that states he is a full-fledged ophthalmologist and eye surgeon. So he makes half a dozen phone calls—gets an offer to take over a practice in Sunnyvale California, and we're off to this sleepy town forty miles south of San Francisco in Mike's brand new black Cadillac with red upholstery and giant fins. God! I hate it! So ostentatious!

(Blackout. Song—The Beach Boys—"Surfin' USA." Lights up on the apartment in Sunnyvale. MIKE is seated. He is wearing a robe. GEORGIE enters hurriedly.)

GEORGIE: Hi, honey. I didn't realize how long it was going to be, but Marcello Mastroianni was fabulous. He—

MIKE: What are you talkin about?

GEORGIE: *La Dolce Vita*—Fellini's latest movie. Anita Ekberg is—

MIKE: I don't go to artsy-fruity movies like that.

GEORGIE: I wish you'd have come with me. Marcello Mastro—

MIKE: (Yelling.) Trevor!

TREVOR: (Offstage.) Yes sir!

(TREVOR enters. He is in his twenties and handsome. He is wearing tight leather pants and is bare chested. He is carrying MIKE's slippers. He kneels in front of him and puts the slippers on MIKE's feet.)

MIKE: (Looking at GEORGIE.) So what do you think?

GEORGIE: (Stunned.) What do I think about what?

MIKE: He tells me there's many more like him up in Portland.

TREVOR: I'm moving here as soon as I put my two apartment buildings up for sale. Oh! Trevor Smythe. (Holds out his hand.)

GEORGIE: (Ignoring TREVOR's hand. To MIKE.) He's stayin for dinner?

TREVOR: (Big smile.) Moroccan-style salmon with couscous and a hazelnut goat cheese salad.

MOM: (Turning up her nose.) So fancy! Couscous? Who eats goat cheese anyway when we have plenty of all-American cheese?

(Lights dim down. A few bars from "The Great Pretender." Lights up on GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: (Bent over holding his back.) Jesus! (Grimaces and straightens up.)

(TREVOR enters from the bedroom wearing a dog collar around his neck and holding a water glass that is full of urine. Places the glass on a table.)

TREVOR: (Sneering.) Are you alright, Georgie?

GEORGIE: I get these fuckin spasms in my back ever since I was in grammar school. We used to play this game called “Buck! Buck! How many fingers up,” and—

TREVOR: Fuck! Fuck! How many fingers up? (Pause.) When’s the last time Mike, uh—(Makes a fist and wiggles it.)—up your keister—?

GEORGIE: No way would I fuck around like that.

TREVOR: There was this little old auntie who hadn’t been able to get a hard-on in years. I felt sorry for the poor dear so I got my fist up to my elbow in his flabby ass—I had ring around the elbow—well—he shot a load that landed on his face.

GEORGIE: You’re disgusting.

TREVOR: (Holds up his fist and twists it—winks at GEORGIE.) To the good doctor. Get him drunk and give him a couple of sniffs of amyl nitrate and—(Another gesture with his fist.) I never met a sadist who wasn’t a masochist.

GEORGIE: (Angry.) That’s bullshit!

TREVOR: For a writer you have a rather limited vocabulary. (Holds up his fist.) Would you like an anal massage, *Georgie Porgie*?

GEORGIE: (Pulls on the dog collar around TREVOR’s neck.) You gonna start barking any second?

TREVOR: Woof! Woof! I go into Jack’s Waterfront Bar and order a beer. Mike makes his grand entrance—he snaps on the dog leash and leads me out of the bar. Oh! I do have another dog collar—would you like to join us in our little charade?

(MIKE enters. He is wearing tight leather pants and a leather vest.)

TREVOR: (To MIKE—very charming.) I was just telling Georgie how good looking he is.

GEORGIE: He’s fuckin two faced. When you’re not around he says these disgusting things about you.

MIKE: You’re just jealous because he’s got everything going for him.

TREVOR: (Picks up the glass of urine—to GEORGIE.) Want a sip?

GEORGIE: Is it what I think it is?

TREVOR: The golden essence of your Lord and Master. (Turns to MIKE—holds up the glass of urine.) Cheers! (TREVOR chug-a-lugs MIKE’s urine.)

(Blackout. A few bars of “Blue Moon.” Lights up on living room in Sunnyvale. MIKE is reading the Mercury News. GEORGIE is working hard at his typewriter. Takes paper out of typewriter.)

GEORGIE: Finished! (Takes bankbook from back pocket. Puts his index finger on it.) There will be another hundred bucks in my savings account.

MIKE: What nudie magazine you sending this one to?

GEORGIE: Modern Sunbathing.

MIKE: The one that erases the sex organs and pubic hair from the nudists?

GEORGIE: That's the one.

MIKE: Does anyone read what you write?

GEORGIE: Only the editors, I'm afraid.

MIKE: What in hell do you write about?

GEORGIE: All kinds of shit. The history of nudism—corny short stories where everyone is nude and they rave about the nudist life style—

MIKE: Shrimp scampi for dinner.

GEORGE: Huh? I don't know how to make something that fancy.

MIKE: Use the recipe that my mom sent.

GEORGIE: But I already took the cube steaks out of the freezer.

MIKE: Make it for three, Georgie.

GEORGIE: Who's your fuckin victim this time?

MIKE: The guy with the washboard stomach and the muscular butt.

GEORGIE: Not Trevor Smythe?

MIKE: He sold his two houses in Portland and—

GEORGIE: So?

MIKE: He's movin in.

GEORGIE: (Raises his voice.) Here? He's stayin here?

MIKE: You catch on quick.

GEORGIE: Are you going to build a special cage for him?

MIKE: The two of you will take turns sleeping with me.

GEORGIE: (Angry.) The two of—? Jesus, Mike!

MIKE: Georgie, I'm sick and tired of your jealousy.

GEORGIE: I see! I see! (Seething anger.) I finally get it.

MIKE: What? What?

GEORGIE: You—you—you want me out of here.

MIKE: You want to be out of here?

GEORGIE: (Voice rising in anger.) Answer my fuckin question.

MIKE: You're telling me what to do?

GEORGIE: God damn it! Do you want me out of here or not?

MIKE: (Shrugs his shoulders.) It's up to you, Georgie.

GEORGIE: Up to me? Up to me? You—you—y'know—(He laughs bitterly.)—it's okay for you to be God Almighty and do whatever you want, but I'm sick and tired of being your fuckin punching bag—of being on the bottom twenty-four hours of every fuckin day.

MIKE: Hold on there. I wanted our relationship to be give and take—

GEORGIE: (Roars with laughter.) That's the funniest thing I've heard all day.

MIKE: So tell me, Georgie—how many times did I go down on you but you couldn't get a hard-on?

GEORGIE: Only twice and that was because—

MIKE: You can't get it up because you don't want to be on top—you want to be on the bottom. You love it there, *Georgie Porgie*. You wallow in it!

GEORGIE: C'mon, Mike, I—

MIKE: You're a vampire. All you want to do is suck my cock, stick your tongue up my asshole, and have me screw the living shit out of you.

GEORGIE: Mike, I'm not gonna keep livin' out this weird fantasy that out of the sack—that in real life you are the master and I'm the slave. Jesus—you've—how many times have you kissed me? Once? Twice? I bet if you made love to me like everybody else I could get it up.

MIKE: You knew how I was before. You—

GEORGIE: I didn't know you were an evil son of a bitch!

MIKE: I've had enough of your shit. Always nagging—always whining. You—

GEORGE: Dr. Marvin Samuels, you think I don't know why you changed your name to Mike Sands? It's because you're ashamed of being a Jew.

MIKE: Dr. Freud here.

GEORGIE: I'm getting the fuck outta here.

MIKE: Good riddance! But first our bankbook. Half of the money belongs to me.

GEORGIE: How 'bout paying me for all the time I've been your fuckin' free receptionist, besides bein' your fuckin' housewife, your personal valet and shit—but what the fuck—take all of it for all I care. (Takes the bankbook from his back pocket and slams it down on the table. Gives MIKE the middle finger.) Fuck you, Marvin Samuels! (Exits.)

OLD GEORGE: Good for you, Georgie! You finally did it!

(Blackout. Song—"I Love Him So Bad." Lights up on GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: I'm packin' my suitcase when—Jesus God—(Lies down on the bed.) Every time I try to move the spasms hit me. (Grabs his back as he gets out of bed.) I pop five Dexamyls. (Pantomimes shoving the pills in his mouth—sits in chair and pantomimes driving.) I drive non-stop to L.A.—Route 66. Flagstaff Arizona. (Sings "Route 66" as a dirge.) "Get your kicks on Route 66. It winds from Chicago to L.A. Over two thousand miles all the way!" (Stops singing.) I just can't—Anyway, he wouldn't take me back even if I—Oklahoma City—Tulsa—Saint Louis—the Pennsylvania Turnpike—the Holland Tunnel, and—thank God—three thousand miles away from Mike.

(Blackout. Song—Peggy Lee—"Fever." Lights up on OLD GEORGE.)

OLD GEORGE: It was the fall of 2005 when I took the CalTrain down to San Jose and I found all these press clippings in the Mercury News in the basement of the public library. (Holds up a stack of 8 by 11 xeroxed pages.)

(Power Point—S'VALE OFFICERS RAID DOCTOR'S TORTURE ROOM—COPS JAIL TORTURE SUSPECT—OFFICER TELLS OF VAIN SEARCH FOR FLOGGING VICTIM OF DR. SAMUELS)

OLD GEORGE: (Reads.) "San Jose Mercury News. November 22nd 1964. A story that might have come out of the pages of the Count de Sade . . ." (Looks directly at the audience.)—It's the Marquis de Sade—(Back to reading.) " . . . was

unfolded here Saturday. Dr. Marvin Samuels, 37, was arrested Friday night in Sunnyvale where police reported finding a torture chamber in which a man was stripped and flogged until he fell unconscious. Tip-off of the torture room came after a film processing company developed a movie film showing a person beating an unidentified male. The grand jury indictment charged Samuels with two counts of conspiracy to prepare and distribute obscene matter and one count of sodomy. The torture chamber may have been a meeting place for a nation-wide group of masochists.”

(Power Point—TORTURE CHAMBER PROBE BEGINS—ODD COLLECTION OF TORTURE TOOLS FOUND—OFFICER TELLS OF VAIN SEARCH FOR FLOGGING VICTIM—JURY BLANCHES AT SADISM FILM FARE)

OLD GEORGE: San Jose Mercury News. April 27th 1965. (Reads.) “A jury of eight women four men was sworn in to hear the State’s lurid ‘home movie’ action against Dr. Marvin Samuels. A color spectacular—‘The Whip and George’—had its painful première showing yesterday. Several of the women on the jury turned pale as they watched Dr. Samuels whip a victim known only as George in a sado-masochistic frenzy. The sadism trial took a mystery turn when Inspector Nieto turned San Francisco’s gay section inside out without producing a clue as to ‘what became of George.’ Inspector Nieto said he was concerned that George might have been killed. Dr. Samuels was found guilty on all counts. The court ordered him to be confined at Vacaville State Institution for psychiatric evaluation for at least ninety days.” (Directly to audience.) I found this on the internet a few years ago. “The Law in its Majestic Equality.” Samuels appealed before the California Court of Appeals and they dismissed the charges. Both men consented and therefore no crime could have occurred.

(Blackout. Song—The Ronettes—“Be My Baby.” Spot on MIKE stage left. He is on the phone. Spot on GEORGIE stage right. He is on the phone.)

MIKE: Hello? Hello?

GEORGIE: Who—who is this?

MIKE: I give you one guess.

GEORGIE: This isn’t—?

MIKE: The one and only.

GEORGIE: Gee, Mike, your voice—it sounds so different. It—

MIKE: I am different.

GEORGIE: How did you get my phone number?

MIKE: Sally.

GEORGIE: Where are you?

MIKE: Everything—everything—gone. My Cadillac. I—

GEORGIE: Someone stole it?

MIKE: My house—my Harley—they cut up my credit cards.

GEORGIE: Mike, uh—Trevor has lots of money.

MIKE: Bankrupt.

GEORGIE: He’s bankrupt?

MIKE: Don't want to talk about him.

GEORGIE: What is going on?

MIKE: I was just released from Vacaville.

GEORGIE: Uh—isn't that the place where they send—the, uh—

MIKE: Criminally insane.

GEORGIE: What happened?

MIKE: I'll tell you about it when I see you.

GEORGIE: (Apprehensive.) See me?

MIKE: I'll be there in a week.

GEORGIE: (Swallows hard.) Here—here in New York?

MIKE: Look for a two-bedroom apartment, Georgie.

GEORGIE: Gee, Mike, I—

MIKE: The only thing they didn't take away is my license to practice medicine.

GEORGIE: Well, then, you'll be able to—

MIKE: My phone is tapped.

GEORGIE: Mike, you're not making much sense You're—

MIKE: I'm sending you five hundred dollars I got from Mom.

GEORGIE: Gee, I—

MIKE: Rent a two-bedroom apartment.

GEORGIE: Sally gave you my address?

MIKE: Sally says you're living in a rat-infested room in Hell's Kitchen with the bathroom down the hall.

GEORGIE: Just some mice rattling around in the ceiling.

MIKE: The upper East Side, Georgie—60s and 70s.

GEORGIE: It's as expensive as hell up there.

MIKE: I don't want you living in that mice-infested room.

GEORGIE: It's all I can afford.

MIKE: You're movin in with me.

GEORGIE: Hell, Mike, I can't afford to pay half the rent on some ritzy place.

MIKE: Who said you have to pay any rent? I'll support you while you do your writing. You won't have to write for those stupid nudist magazines. (Pause.) Georgie, you mean a lot to me. (Long pause.) Are you there?

GEORGIE: I'm here, honey.

(Spot out on MIKE.)

OLD GEORGE: (Stands up.) You're already calling him honey?

GEORGIE: Stop bothering me!

OLD GEORGE: Don't fall for it, Georgie.

GEORGIE: Fuck off, goddammit! Leave me alone!

OLD GEORGE: I guess you have to learn the hard way.

(Blackout. Song. Spot up on MOM.)

MOM: Sweetheart, the professor is old—old and cold—ready for the grave.
Sometimes I—(Pantomimes squeezing his throat.)—I want to put my hands
around his throat—thin—thin like a turkey's neck—squeeze—squeeze.

(Blackout.)

ANNOUNCER: 1966. U.S. planes begin bombing Hanoi in North Vietnam—
Replacing homophobic Harold Taubman as *New York Times* drama critic,
Stanley Kauffman defends the right of homosexuality to be freely expressed in
drama.

(SALLY's studio apartment. SALLY is behind a six foot high screen of movie stars.
GEORGIE is lying in bed with a blanket pulled up to his stomach.)

SALLY: Bloody Marys coming up

GEORGIE: Just—just—my God—I don't feel so hot.

SALLY: (Enters with the two Bloody Marys.) Is it that time of the month? (Hands
Bloody Mary to GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: (Sips the Bloody Mary.) My Pall Malls.

SALLY: (Hands GEORGIE a cigarette, lights it for him.) Feeling any better, dear
heart?

GEORGIE: (Grabs his back.) Until my next spasm.

SALLY: Heavens to Betsy! (Claps his hands.) What are you going to name your
firstborn?

GEORGIE: (Laughs.) Mike Junior.

SALLY: Honey bun, I see you are still possessed by that pathetic imitation of the
Marquis de Sade.

GEORGIE: (Peeved.) Well, honey bun, you stuck out like a sore thumb last night.

SALLY: Puh-lease! Among that parade of mincing queens in leather regalia? (Sits on
edge of bed and sips his Bloody Mary.) What was the name of that horrible den
of iniquity?

GEORGIE: The Silver Dollar.

SALLY: I poured you into a taxi and you regurgitated all over the seat.

GEORGIE: I didn't!

SALLY: I tipped the hackie a Lincoln but he still got his mammary glands in an
uproar.

GEORGIE: Jesus, I'll pay you back, Sally.

SALLY: I took it out in trade.

GEORGIE: You did what?

SALLY: While you were fantasizing about your knight in shining leather.
(GEORGIE feels his butt.)

SALLY: Dear heart, all I did was nibble on your teenie weenie.

(SALLY gropes GEORGIE, but he pushes SALLY's hand away.)

GEORGIE: Cut out the shit.

SALLY: I must say, you have the most delectable joy juice.

GEORGIE: Gee! That's the best compliment I've had all morning.

SALLY: Toots, it's afternoon.

(GEORGIE gets out of bed, cigarette in one hand—Bloody Mary in the other. He is in his jockey shorts.)

SALLY: Holy Mary! Did that evil queen use a bullwhip on—?

GEORGIE: (Laughs.) Actually he beats me with a wet noodle.

SALLY: (Rolls his eyes.) If he hits your kidneys it could be the final curtain.

GEORGIE: Come off it, Sally. Mike knows exactly what he's doing. For chrissakes, he's a fuckin doctor.

SALLY: You can say that again!

GEORGIE: Very funny.

SALLY: I've watched her—I don't know if it's the barbiturates or the cocaine but—Mary—she's turning into a virulent old sadist.

GEORGIE: Sally, ever since Mike begged me to move back in with him—he's really changed. Hell, he supports me and—and he tells me how much he loves me—he's taking me to Acapulco in December on his money. (Holds out his left hand and shows the ring.)

SALLY: (Looking at ring. Makes a horrid face.) Skull and crossbones and an itsy bitsy diamond? Such plebeian taste!

GEORGIE: You don't understand because you never trusted anyone in your life. (Puts on his pants.) Like when Mike ties me up, it's—I let go of everything. I'm in a state of bliss because I'm completely in the hands of the man I love.

SALLY: (Pantomimes playing the violin.) Hearts and flowers.

GEORGIE: You're so—so cynical!

SALLY Honey, you're Lillian Gish on a chunk of ice fifty feet from the waterfall.

GEORGIE: (Puts on his T-shirt and his shoes.) You just don't know. Mike is really changing for the better. He—

SALLY: Your Lothario is at this very moment madly whipping derrieres in the City of Brotherly Love.

GEORGIE: So what? I have sex with other guys.

SALLY: Georgie, one of these years you will get enough of the evil doctor and you'll move in with Mother.

GEORGIE: Oh, wow! You're jealous of Mike.

SALLY: How on earth did you ever figure that out, dearie?

(Blackout. Song. Spot up on GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: After I don't know how many more rejection slips I give up on writing novels and short stories I write a one act play called "*Degrees*"—I submit it to Theatre Genesis in the East Village. The miracle happens—a two-week run of my gay play. I get a production of my second play "*17 Loves and 17 Kisses*" at a loft theatre on Seventh Avenue. (Makes a wry face as he holds up a yellowed paper.) This is the review from *Backstage*.

ANNOUNCER: "The main fault of the play is a lack of organic structure which results in an overall unbelievability. Dialogue and intense feeling do not make a play. Some interesting moments, but not enough. Aside to all concerned: are you sure Eugene O'Neill started like this?"

(Blackout. Song—The Four Tops—"I Can't Help Myself." Dim lights. GEORGIE is taking off his clothes. MIKE enters carrying a large black bag.)

GEORGIE: Y'know Jim Garrison—(Takes off his pants.)—the D.A. of New Orleans? He says he's going to solve the Kennedy assassination. (GEORGIE is naked.) I know it wasn't Lee Harvey Oswald who assassinated Kennedy. Just like Trotsky in Mexico—

(MIKE takes a sock from his black bag and stuffs it in GEORGIE's mouth. Then he blindfolds GEORGIE.)

MIKE: On your stomach.

(GEORGIE lies on his stomach and MIKE ties him to the bed. The lights dim down.)

GEORGIE: (Voice on tape.) Sylvienne—what—what a stupid name—I like Sylvia better. Shit, I rewrite the part just for you and—and—you have trouble with your lines, but there isn't another actress who will take the part and you do have a wonderful naïve quality that's perfect—they think my play is crazy and—and maybe it is—maybe it is—Mike, I want to watch the Smothers Brothers, but—a rerun of *Guns smoke*? Give me a break! Mike—your taste is up your ass! I'm surprised you don't read comic books. Che Guevara—Jesus God—they capture him—where is it, uh—Bolivia or Argentina? Fuckin CIA killers—killers—shit, almost out of vodka and got to get the money from you. What—what—my nose—it itches. Mike, where—oh—oh—honey—you—you—how long—us—let's see—together?—Uh—July 10th 1959—yes, almost eight fuckin years—eight years. Jesus God, I—

(MIKE motions to the man who enters. The man gets on top of GEORGIE. We have psychedelic lighting during the rape.)

GEORGIE: (Voice on tape.) Oh, Mike—that feels so—so—oh, Daddy! Daddy! I—uh—honey—honey, uh—honey—oh—what? What? (Pause—suspicious.) Mike? Mike? You—Oh my God. Jesus Christ Almighty. What is—what is—? (Pause.)—Cigar?—Fuckin cigar? Soft—sticky—yuck—(Angry.)—Jesus God. Who—who the fuck? (Struggling—trying to get free.)—I can't—ain't—my God—Mike?—Can't be—what the fuck is—? God damn it. I—

(GEORGIE jerks his right arm free—takes the sock out of his mouth.)

GEORGIE: Get the fuck away from me, goddammit! (Gives the man a shove—the man exits. Lights are brighter.)

MIKE: What is the matter with you?

GEORGIE: (Sobbing.) What is the matter with me?

MIKE: You didn't get a kick out of his big dick?

GEORGIE: Jesus—Jesus—I—

MIKE: I'm sick and tired of supporting your dead ass. I want you out of here by the end of the month.

(Blackout. Song—Nancy Sinatra—“These Boots Were Made For Walking.” Lights up on GEORGIE kneeling at the side of the bed, his eyes closed. He is in terrible pain. MIKE enters from bedroom. Moves toward exit, then stops. Shakes his head in disgust.)

GEORGIE: (Looks up. Bites his lip in pain.) Mike, can you give me a shot for the pain?

MIKE: (Sarcastic.) I’m late for a hot date with Montgomery Clift. (Frowns.) This is the last day of the month, Georgie.

GEORGIE: I’m movin in with Dan as soon as—

MIKE: Who?

GEORGIE: Dan. He’s playing the lead in “*Daddy Violet*.”

MIKE: Oh, him. I fucked him.

GEORGIE: I know you did.

MIKE: (Looks at his watch.) You’ve got until midnight to move out.

GEORGIE: (Has a spasm. Closes his eyes in pain.) Jesus! (Touches his lower spine.) The spasms in my back are—Jesus!

MIKE: You’ve had spasms before and they didn’t stop you from cruising and getting arrested.

GEORGIE: The spasms in my back are worse and—(Grabs his leg.)—my leg has gone numb. It—(Tries to get off the bed—falls on the floor.)

MIKE: (Claps his hands.) Bravo! A great performance.

GEORGIE: If you don’t believe it’s numb get a fuckin ice pick, stick it in my leg.

MIKE: (Grins.) That’s a great idea.

GEORGIE: Gee, Mike, I can’t—

MIKE: (Shakes his head in disgust.) You’re disgusting. I’ll give you a shot of morphine but I want you out of here by midnight.

(Blackout. Song. Spot up on GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: (Wearing a back brace. Pats it.) It’s a kind of fortified corset but it does the trick and the spasms leave my back and the numbness starts to leave my leg. Two weeks later I’m able to walk out of Mike’s apartment. Dan helps me move to his pad on West End Avenue. I’m in a deep depression but somehow I manage to direct and play the title role in my new play.

(Blackout. Song—“I Hear a Symphony.”)

ANNOUNCER: *The Village Voice*, June 15 1967. “George Birimisa’s *Daddy Violet* is effective on a mysterious, unfamiliar, oddly provocative level. It came alive, drew me into its offhand, undefined world, and took me through a provocative adventure. Birimisa directed and acted in his own play. His acting is extravagant, impulsively daring, taut with restrained force; but with no character to hide behind—leaves him exposed to the play’s and his own fierce vision. What a curious and cunning thing Birimisa has made.”

(Spot up on GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: It's a dream come true. A two-week run at the famous Caffè Cino and a fabulous review in the *New York Times*. I get an agent who books a tour of colleges in the U.S. and Canada—ending up with an Equity production in San Francisco. Back in New York I'm on fire. In a creative frenzy I write "*Mister Jello*" and get a Rockefeller Grant for a production in London. Then comes my "*Georgie Porgie*"—it's optioned for Off Broadway. My agent trumpets me as the next Tennessee Williams. I'm sitting on top of the world! Boom!—Just like that the producers drop the option. They tell me that full frontal nudity of a black man with a large cock and simulated homo sex—it would ruin their reputation. (Pause—deep sigh.) Then nothing—nothing. Three months later my option money runs out and I go to work as a Laurie Girl—(Bitter laugh.)—typing royalty checks for famous writers.

(Blackout. Song. Flats move in. GEORGIE's tiny apartment. A table and two chairs. A small TV set on a table and a typewriter. A hot, muggy day in New York.

GEORGIE is in his underwear typing furiously. Takes paper out of typewriter and places it in folder. There is a knock on the door.)

GEORGIE: Come in!

(MIKE enters. He is wearing a tight-fitting jiu-jitsu T-shirt—"CHOKE—NO AIR—NO ATTITUDE"—and a taekwon-do headband. He is carrying an Aiki jiu-jitsu sword in a leather scabbard.)

GEORGIE: Hi!

MIKE: How come you don't lock the door?

GEORGIE: I guess I forgot to.

MIKE: Hmmm.

GEORGIE: How 'bout a cup of Nescafe?

MIKE: (Pauses as he looks around.) Claustrophobic.

GEORGIE: (Laughs nervously.) My seventh heaven pad. Six flights up, y'know?

MIKE: Can't you rent anything better than this rat trap?

GEORGIE: They dropped the option on "*Georgie Porgie*."

MIKE: How about the Rockefeller Grant?

GEORGIE: It was a travel grant—just enough bread for the plane fare and expenses in London.

(They stare at each other—a silence. MIKE sees GEORGIE's back.)

MIKE: You got tough skin—no scars.

GEORGIE: Haven't had any back spasms in over six months and the numbness is almost all gone from my leg.

(MIKE puts the sword on the bed.)

MIKE: (Sees GEORGIE staring at sword.) The discipline of jiu-jitsu makes a complete person, building character, weapons defense, courage, and other mental arts.

GEORGIE: (Trying to stay calm.) Gee! Sounds interesting.

MIKE: (Looking GEORGIE up and down.) I have a high art. (Insinuating.) I hurt with cruelty—(Pause.)—those who would damage me.

GEORGIE: (First feeling of fear.) Gee, Mike, is that a proverb?

MIKE: A skillful warrior strikes a decisive blow and stops. He does not continue his attack to assert his mastery. He will strike the blow, but be on his guard against being vain and arrogant over his success. He strikes it as a matter of necessity, but not from a wish of mastery.

GEORGIE: I see.

MIKE: How to snatch a gun right out of a gangster's hand so fast it will tear off his finger and then cave in his chest—(Pause.)—with a single beat.

(MIKE grunts as he demonstrates an Aiki jiu-jitsu fighting stance. Chops the air with his hands. Moves towards GEORGIE—finally stops.)

MIKE: Aiki jiu-jitsu.

GEORGIE: (Fear.) Wow! That's, um—graceful, y'know?

MIKE: I didn't wear my black belt.

GEORGIE: You got a black belt?

MIKE: Takes six—seven years, but it took me nine months.

GEORGIE: Doesn't surprise me, Mike. You're great at everything you do.

MIKE: The wise are free from perplexities, the virtuous from anxiety, and the bold from fear. (Points to GEORGIE's small TV.) Your television set.

GEORGIE: What about it?

MIKE: Black and white?

GEORGIE: I can't afford a color set.

MIKE: I'm borrowing it.

GEORGIE: Oh? Did your color TV go on the blink?

MIKE: I didn't say that.

GEORGIE: Then why do you—?

MIKE: Ever since the cable company put the cable in the basement I knew they were up to something fishy.

GEORGIE: (Puzzled.) The cable company?

MIKE: (Impatient.) The Johnny Carson show.

GEORGIE: The what?

MIKE: When I put your TV next to mine I know I will see two different Johnny Carson shows.

GEORGIE: (Stunned.) You—you will? (Sits.)

MIKE: Georgie, the FBI hired Johnny Carson to drive me crazy.

GEORGIE: (Stunned silence.) Really? On—on national television?

MIKE: That is correct. (They look at each other. MIKE sits down opposite GEORGIE. Leans forward.) You think I'm crazy, don't you? (GEORGIE is terrified and trying not to show it.) You think I belong on the funny farm.

GEORGIE: Heck no. I—no—no. Of course not. (Lamely.) Gee, Mike. You can borrow my TV and—

MIKE: I don't need your permission. (Pause.) Georgie, a dog won't forsake his master because of his ill fortune.

GEORGIE: (Incredulous.) What are you—?

MIKE: (Holds up two fingers.) You left me not only once—but twice!

GEORGIE: I did?

MIKE: You have a convenient memory. In Sunnyvale you called me an evil son of a bitch! And—(Holds up his middle finger.)—you—you—gave me the bird—you said “Fuck you, Marvin Samuels!” (Pounds his chest.) I'm Mike Sands.

GEORGIE: Gee! I know you're Mike Sands. Jesus—I—

MIKE: Now that you're a big deal playwright you won't have anything to do with me.

GEORGIE: That's not true, Mike. It—

MIKE: (Holds up two fingers.) Two! Two! Two!

GEORGIE: You asked me to split. Remember?

MIKE: (Crosses to the bed—takes the sword out of the scabbard—takes a step toward GEORGIE.) Lying lips are an abomination.

GEORGIE: (Looks at the sword—holds up his hands palms outward.) I left you. (Pause.) I left you—uh—twice! Twice! (Holds up two fingers.) Two times! Two times!

MIKE: I'm not an idiot. I heard you the first time. (Waves the sword.) Where is he, Georgie?

GEORGIE: Where is who?

MIKE: Ed Horonzy, the—

GEORGIE: Oh, Ed? (Gulps.) He crashed here for a couple of days and I haven't seen him in a long time. I—

MIKE: Georgie, to associate with evil men is like sleeping in the midst of knives and swords—although you have not been wounded, you are constantly afraid.

GEORGIE: Go have a look. I—

(MIKE exits stage left into bedroom. Re-enters a moment later. Does an exhibition with the sword while GEORGIE watches in terror. Moves closer and closer to GEORGIE, narrowly missing him. Stops. Puts sword on the table. Sits down at table. Stares directly into GEORGIE's eyes. Silence for ten seconds.)

GEORGIE: I love you, Mike Sands.

(Very slowly GEORGIE leans forward and kisses MIKE on the lips. There is a five second silence as they stare at each other. Then MIKE stands up, puts his sword in the scabbard, unplugs the TV set, and exits with it.)

GEORGIE: (Long pause—hands to his face.) Jesus! Jesus!—Oh God. (After a moment lights a cigarette with shaking hands. Puts out the cigarette and takes a deep breath. Sits down at typewriter.) I know—I know you're here. (Crosses to OLD GEORGE. Hands him the folder with the play in it.) I'd like you to read it and tell me what you really think of it. No bullshit!

OLD GEORGE: (Takes the folder. Opens it.) “*A Dress Made of Diamonds.*”

MOM: (Stands.) Georgie, you are just like Violet, your no-good sister! (Starts to exit, stops.) She dresses like a whore to make my wonderful Daddy do nasty things to her down below. (Exits.)

(OLD GEORGE embraces GEORGIE.)

CURTAIN



Trauma Flintstone developed the role of Sally the madame in the 2006 staged reading of *Viagra Falls*.

Photo by James McColley Eilers

PERVERSIONS



George won the gold medal in Physique '90 at the Arcadia Bodybuilding Championships at the Herbst Theater in San Francisco.

Photographer unknown

Joe, Where Are You Now?

Originally Published in *Torso*, 1983

Joe, Where Are You Now?

When I go out on a sunny day, I wear a cap with a visor to protect my sensitive eyes from the glare. When I go out at night, I also wear a cap with a visor. I can't help but wonder—am I protecting my eyes from the glare of the moon?

The truth is—I don't have much of a hairline and I have a rather large bald spot on the back of my head. I wear the cap to hide my balding head from my fellow human beings.

There—I've said it—my confession. It is very hard for me to admit such a petty thing. It is much easier for me to admit my mortal sins. In the Fifties I robbed a soldier who had just been discharged from the Army. I met him in a bar—we had a few drinks and then he showed me the inevitable picture of his wife and two children. A few more drinks and we staggered to a nearby hotel. After sex he fell into a deep sleep. It was an easy matter for me to steal his wallet and his watch. I am still convinced that the two hundred dollars I stole was every cent he had to his name—I was sure he was taking it home to his wife and children. It was a lot of money in the Fifties.

The next morning I bought myself a sharkskin suit. Appropriate, wouldn't you say?

Quite simply, the truth makes me uncomfortable—I've always tried to avoid it. I am a liar—one of the best in the business. I trust characters like Mack the Knife. I know where they stand.

Therefore, in this factual account of my life, you will find plenty of lies. You see, I really don't know how to tell the truth.

1937 When I was thirteen years old, my mother shipped me to my Aunt Mary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Even though Auntie was on home relief, she was my passport to freedom. After all, I had spent four years in a Catholic orphanage for boys, even though I wasn't an orphan. Then I spent a year with my mother and her brand-new husband—he was a Nazi who hated my guts because I didn't have blond hair and blue eyes.

The North Side of Pittsburgh in 1937 was a slum that had a beer parlor on every block. The park was across the street from where we lived, and it was full of Depression bums—some of them with college degrees.

Since I needed a good excuse to roam the streets, I talked Auntie into letting me sell the Press and Sun-Telegraph in the afternoon after school, and the Post-Gazette at night. I only had ten customers on my paper route, but Mrs. Incardona was my favorite.

She rolled her cigarettes on a machine, and every time I'd deliver a paper I'd roll ten cigarettes for her, and she would give me a homemade cookie, a cup of tea, and all the gossip. She lived in a tenement near the railroad tracks. Her apartment was colorless except for a picture of Valentino as *The Sheik* in the parlor.

One afternoon I left her apartment with a cookie in one hand and my newspapers in the other. I hurried down the dimly lit hall that was filled with the smell of cabbage. Just as I shoved the cookie into my mouth, a hunched-over man scuttled from behind a door. "In here!" he hissed as he jerked me into the bathroom in the hallway. He sat down on the toilet—he unzipped my fly. I felt the warmth of his mouth against my crotch. When he finished, he carefully placed a half a dollar in the palm of my hand. "You're a big boy," he whispered. "You got hair around it." I felt his breath against my ear. "Don't tell anyone about us—it's a secret! If you see me in the street, pretend you never saw me before." He pushed at the door. "Go on—quick!" As soon as I was in the hallway, he slammed the door.

I danced down the street. My body tingled as I rushed into Isaly's and bought a rainbow ice-cream cone. I spent the rest of the money on cigarettes and candy bars.

No matter how much sex I had on the street, I still masturbated at least twice a day. Since we lived in a single room, I would rush upstairs to the toilet in the hallway. I'd shoot off into the bathtub. The next day Auntie would scream at me, "You're doing nasty things in the bathroom, Georgie! You're going to hell!" After that I made sure I cleaned up after I masturbated.

I finally got scared when Dorgan, the man in the newspaper shack, examined the palm of my hand. "Aha!" he announced for all to hear. "You see this line that goes all the way across your palm to your wrist? Well, it's red—that means you jacked off today."

My ears burned hot with embarrassment. I couldn't figure it out—how did Dorgan know?

It was early evening when I saw the good-looking man in the park—he was urinating in the bushes. I stopped dead in my tracks—my eyes were riveted on his penis.

"It's nice and clean," he said. "I just took a bath."

"Huh?"

"It's just for you," he said. "Suck it!"

"I never did it before," I blurted.

He was wide-mouthed, with a square chin. "Where have you been all your life?"

"What do you mean—where have I been all my life?"

He looked at me for the first time—his eyes sparkled with confidence. "Don't you know that everybody's doing it?"

"They are?" My eyes were still riveted on his penis.

"Sure they are." There was something coarse and vital about him that made my heart hammer in my chest. "It's what everybody's doing nowadays," he continued. "It's very fashionable."

"It is?"

"Yep." The head of his penis glistened—it was angry red. "See?" He pulled at it. "It's nice and hard."

My stomach jerked—the blood roared in my ears.

"Just kiss it," he begged.

“Naw—I’m goin’ home.” But I didn’t move.

“It’s just like velvet.” He smiled with animal-white teeth. I think he knew I was hooked because he wasn’t begging anymore—he seemed confident. “It’s gonna feel nice and warm in your mouth—just like a tit.”

“It is?”

His big hands were on my shoulders, pushing me to my knees. His voice was a command. “Open your mouth, kid!”

When I got home, I rushed upstairs to the toilet and washed out my mouth over and over. “That was awful—especially the stuff in my mouth!” However, I kept looking for the cocky young man—I knew in my heart that I wanted to do it again.

I wrote over a hundred poems when I was in the seventh grade. One of the poems I wrote was about Joe Conjyrowski. Not only was Joe the smartest kid at Latimer Junior High School, he also played on the varsity basketball team, and was student body president when we were in the ninth grade.

I was the sports writer for *Latimer Life*, and I always mentioned Joe in my write-ups—in one game against Conroy, I turned him into the hero although all he did was score one basket.

I’d sit in class and drool over his heavy-shouldered, muscular body. I never got tired of looking into his sparkling, gray eyes that were framed by square, rimless glasses. He had an upturned nose and a jutting jaw just like Superman.

As I stared at Joe, my heart would thump with wild excitement. I’d wave my hand frantically at Miss Dunlop—she would excuse me and I’d rush to the lavatory and masturbate over Joe Conjyrowski.

It was embarrassing to take a shower with Joe after gym class—I’d get an erection and I’d try to hide it behind my towel. Joe would grin and wink at me. I’d blush to the roots of my hair, wondering if he knew the why of my erection.

I was jealous as hell of Marisa Hofstadler because she was always going to bed with Joe.

Marisa was two years older than the other girls in the seventh grade, and she wore high heels and silk stockings. Rumor had it that she had slept with some of the football players from Allegheny High. Marisa was always slipping notes to Joe in Study Hall—once she gave him a “dirty” book of *The Katzenjammer Kids*—Joe showed it to me—I thought it was dumb.

Surprisingly, it wasn’t Joe who did the talking about Marisa—it was the other way around. Marisa would jabber on and on about her sexual experiences with Joe to anyone who would listen, and I was ready, willing, and able.

“Joe was so cute when he finished doing you-know-what for the first time.” She laughed and pressed her hand to her mouth to hide her uneven teeth. “He turned the overhead light on. He was lying on the bed without any clothes on—not even his B.V.D.s!” She took her hand away from her mouth. “He wasn’t ashamed that he was as naked as the day he was born.” She paused for dramatic effect. “Guess what, George? He wanted to do it again, but this time with the light on. I put my foot down—I wasn’t about to let Joe see me without any clothes on in the bright light.” She giggled. “But Joe—he was so cute lying there with his whachamacallit almost touching his bellybutton.”

Her stories about Joe made me crazy with lust. One weekend I spent my time running up the stairs to the toilet—I'm positive I masturbated into the tub at least twelve times in a forty-eight-hour period. All I could think of was Joe, Joe, and more Joe.

Joe was the same age as the other boys in the seventh grade—it was just that he seemed older. Not only did he do everything better, but he glowed with a quiet confidence.

It was during morning recess—as usual, a group of us were gathered around Joe. “Hey, did you see the Gene Autry movie?” Elbie Veseley asked. “He threw this rope across the road—all the crooks that were chasing him got knocked off their horses—it was neat!” Elbie was blond and blue-eyed and first string on the soccer team, with great legs.

“Autry sings too much—it ain't real,” said Joe. “I like Buck Jones. I saw him in a double feature at the Ohio.” He picked his nose and then looked at his finger. “Let me tell you what happened while I was watchin' the movie. This old man sat down next to me—he put his hand on my leg, and then he grabbed for my peter. He—”

“Did you belt him in the mouth?” asked Elbie.

Joe shook his head slowly and frowned. “I felt sorry for him in a way—he was old. But—what ticked me off was that he had no right to grab for my dick.” He took off his rimless glasses and put them back on again. “All he had to do was ask me in a nice way. I would've let him do it.”

“You mean suck your cock?” The words jumped out of my mouth with a life of their own.

“Sure! I like a good blow job—sometimes it's better than screwin'.”

“Really?” I couldn't keep my mouth shut.

Joe stared at me with a steady, penetrating gaze. I was sure he could see my soul. He reached between his legs and rubbed himself. “George, you want to suck my dick?”

I blushed to the roots of my hair—I felt my ears burning. I wanted to run away and hide, but I stood rooted to the spot. “That's okey-dokey with me, Joe,” I said through stiff lips. “I'll suck your dick, but you gotta suck my dick first.”

Everybody laughed and I felt better. Joe punched me lightly on the shoulder and winked at me. I knew I hadn't fooled him.

It happened when we were in the ninth grade. It was the spring of 1940 when Joe jumped me in the darkened cloakroom during recess. We grappled and banged against the walls. Joe wasn't any bigger than me but he was a lot stronger. He got a headlock on my neck—he forced me to my knees—before I knew what had happened, my face was jammed into his crotch.

I gasped for air. I was so excited I almost burst a blood vessel. I knew if Joe had unzipped his fly, I would've sucked him off. It was then I felt the sharp pain in my hand. “Son of a bitch!” I yowled. “You stabbed me, Joe!”

I broke away from him and rushed out of the darkened cloakroom. I looked at the pencil in surprise—it was sticking out of the palm of my hand.

“I didn't mean to stab you,” said Joe. “I was holding it in my hand, and—”

As I sit at my typewriter now, I can still see the tiny, black dot on the palm of my right hand—it is the mark of Joe's pencil—a tattoo that will never go away as long as I live.

I bumped into Joe in a beer parlor on the North Side a few years after I got out of the Navy at the end of World War Two. He still wore the same square, rimless glasses and it was just like old times—I felt the blood pounding in my temples when I looked into his sparkling, gray eyes.

He drank his Iron City beer directly from the bottle as he told me that he was married—that he was the father of a three-year-old girl—that he worked at the H.J. Heinz factory.

“You work in a factory?” I couldn’t keep the surprise out of my voice.

“It’s good pay and steady.” His voice was soft but powerful.

“But—but you were the smartest kid at Latimer,” I protested. “You were student body president and everything.”

He shrugged and looked away. “So what?”

“So what?” In those days I wasn’t very tactful. “Hell, Joe, I thought you’d go to Carnegie Tech or get the hell out of this filthy town like I did. I guess you know I’m only here to visit my Auntie for a few days.”

“I like it here in Pittsburgh,” he said quietly. “I’m foreman of the vinegar department.”

“You like working in a factory?” I scoffed. “Especially Heinz? I heard all about the lousy pay and long hours.”

“Keep up the shit and I’ll knock your teeth down your throat.” His frown turned into a grin—his gray eyes twinkled as he put his arm around my shoulder.

“I—I—” I stuttered. The touch of him made my stomach jerk—my knees turned to water.

“It’s good to see you again, George, after all these years.”

I felt his hot breath against my neck. I shivered.

“You know what, George?”

“What?”

“You were different than the other boys at Latimer.”

“I was?”

I felt his knee press hard against my leg. My penis was stiff—I was sure I was going to spurt all over my B.V.D.s.

“Yeah, you were,” he answered.

“I, uh—I don’t know what you mean.”

“You’re odd! That’s what I mean.”

I wanted to answer, “You mean queer?” I leaned forward—I took a deep breath but nothing came out of my mouth.

“You’re going to tell me something.” There was something electric in his voice that hadn’t been there before.

“Uh—I—I—”

“You can tell me anything,” he whispered.

“Anything?” My voice trembled with doubt.

“Yeah, anything!” He nodded his head and smiled encouragement. “I’m not like the other guys. I know how to keep my mouth shut.”

I wanted to say, “Look, Joe, let’s get a hotel room and spend the night together. I want to suck your cock. I want you to kiss me and hold me and—what do you say, Joe?”

Instead I finished my beer—I lit another cigarette and said, “I’m leaving for California in the morning. I’m going to Hollywood—I’m gonna get into the movies!”

I saw the disappointment in his gray eyes—they no longer sparkled.

“I, uh—I got to go now,” I mumbled.

He punched me lightly on the shoulder—he gave me a sad, mocking look. “I’ll see you in the movies, George.”

“Yeah,” I answered lamely as I headed for the exit. “I’ll see you around.”

As I walked down the street, I cursed myself for being a coward. I never saw Joe Conjyrowski again.

The North Side of the River

Originally Published in *American Vanguard*, 1953
by “George Bermain”

Written under one of several pseudonyms that George employed, “*The North Side of the River*” was included in an anthology of “fresh and new literary talent” as an excerpt from an unpublished novel. “These young writers,” wrote editors Brom Weber and Charles I. Glicksberg in their introduction, “communicate the pain and perversity as well as the sheer joy of love.”

1947 THE NIGHT AIR was cold and damp, the winter wind on Arch Street as he had always known it. Sam hunched his shoulders familiarly against it. He walked along the dingy street, the street he had walked so many times in his youth, Arch Street, the all-alike once-red brick houses deep shadows against the night. An oblong of dim light from a third-story window, a distorted silhouette playing on the drawn blinds. A car, lights feeling the blackness, puttering slowly down the narrow street, coming into the light of the corner street lamp. Still the sweet smell of candy permeating the air, emanating from the now-quiet factory at the bottom of Monument Hill.

Sam put one foot in front of the other—he had to make a conscious effort to do this. Somehow, he couldn’t do it mechanically; he couldn’t walk down his street with the same casual air he walked down the other streets of the city. He glanced down. He could almost see the time-worn, cracked pavement. The same. He remembered how he used to close his eyes, counting each step he took, keeping them closed as long as possible. Once he had counted to fifty before opening them, and had almost fallen into the gutter. And now he’d count the steps from his home to the corner, exactly one hundred and ninety-nine.

Arch Street was silent with night, the only sound the hollow clack-clack of Sam’s metal-tipped heels against the old pavement. The light of the street lamp touched him. He was on the corner—the corner in front of the drugstore. The deep green mailbox on the once-white stone base that had always been there. Sam stood on the corner, irresolute.

The door of the drugstore opened. Warm air rushed out. The door closed. Sam dug his hands deep in his pockets. He felt chilled. His eyes found the young man who stood indolently in the doorway. The young man rubbed his hands together, pulled out a cigarette, lit it with a shiny lighter, then let it hang out the side of his mouth. He swayed on the balls of his feet, his hands in his pockets, pulled close to his body. Then he moved, slowly, confidently, toward the street lamp. He leaned against it, crossing

one black suede shoe over the other. The light of the street lamp deflected on the pulled-down brim of his hat; Sam couldn't see his face.

Then the door opened again. Sam looked hard. He shrugged his shoulders. Another young man he didn't know. He saw the cigarette hanging, the hat brim pulled low, the black suede shoes, the hands in pockets. Moving toward the street lamp, leaning against it. The two young men looking straight ahead, expressionless, talking, the only movement the bobbing of their cigarettes.

Sam turned away. He had a strange feeling in the pit of his stomach, a feeling he did not know. He took a quick glance over his shoulder at the two young men leaning against the lamppost. Then he crossed the street.

He was there, as always, standing in front of the newsstand, hitting one foot against the other, his thin shoulders bent. The same.

"Hi, Slim!"

The man turned around. His quick, darting eyes flicked over Sam. His voice was thin, squeaky. "Hiya, Sam! I ain't seen ya in a long time. Where ya bin?"

Sam grinned. "Oh, I bin around. Y'know, the Navy, and New York for a spell. Seen a lot and done a lot, I guess. How's things with you?"

"Just the same as always, Sam, just the same." The angular head, on the long, scrawny neck, nodded. His hands were in the change-apron tied around his waist, clinking the coins restlessly. "You were lucky, eh, Sam?"

"Whacha mean?"

"Oh, gettin' in the Navy, and all that."

"Ya think so, Slim?"

The head moved up and down, one foot hit the other, the hands were busy in the change-apron. "Yeah," he said.

Sam stood on the corner in front of the newsstand watching Slim. Slim, answering the honk of a horn, nimbly running and handing the paper to the driver. Slim, selling the comic books that Sam had read while waiting for the bulldog delivery of the morning paper; all the same magazines and the dream books and racing forms. Slim, sipping steaming coffee from a cardboard container. Slim, glancing at Sam.

Suddenly, Sam felt depressed, defeated. His hands and feet felt cold. There was the feel of snow in the air. He turned, to go home, to Aunt Martha, and the room that was his on the second floor. "Be good, Slim. I'll see ya!"

"Bin nice seein' ya, Sam. S'long!"

Sam crossed the street. Another youth had joined the two young men leaning against the lamppost. Sam strode by quickly, not looking at them. Then he saw the newsboy on his street. He wore blue jeans, an old orange sweater that was too big for him, and tennis shoes. He moved along Arch Street briskly. He changed his papers from one hand to the other, keeping one small hand in the pocket of his blue jeans. As he hurried past Sam, he glanced up. His face was blank, his child voice mechanical. "Post-Gazette, mister?"

Just like me, Sam thought, right down to the tennis shoes. I'll bet he has two pairs of socks on.

The boy was past Sam, turning the corner, heading toward Federal Street and the bars. "Hey, boy!" Sam shouted. "Gimme a paper!" The boy turned nimbly and ran back. He moved lightly on his tennis shoes. Sam flipped him a quarter. "Keep the change."

The boy opened his mouth to speak. There was a startled look on his face. Then it was gone. The blank look reappeared. He hurried around the corner, moving his papers to the other arm.

Down the dark street. He began to count the steps to himself. One, two, three, four—then he heard the fast click-click of high heels coming toward him. The girl, a dim shadow, slid past him. He caught a glimpse of her face. “Shirley!” he called. “Shirley Davis!”

She paused uncertainly, trying to pierce the darkness with her eyes. “Who—who is it?”

“Sam. Y’know, Sam Scrivner!”

“Why, Sam! Well, this is a surprise. Heavens! Where on earth have you been?”

“I bin around, Shirley, all over, I guess. Bin messin’ around New York since I got outta the service.” Sam held her by the elbows, trying to get a good look at her face in the darkness. “But you’re grown up. You’re quite a woman!”

Her tone had a sudden sadness. “It has been a long time, hasn’t it, Sam?”

“Yeah! Five years, Shirley. Look, let’s not stand out here. I can’t even get a good look at ya. How about a drink?”

“I don’t drink, Sam, but I’ll sit one out with you.”

“Swell!”

Shirley, Shirley Davis. Allegheny High. Seven years before . . . she was a freshman, fourteen years old. He was a junior, sixteen. He had flunked algebra two years straight and was in her class. She was the prettiest, the only one who wasn’t flat-chested, and Sam had heard about her. She had a reputation in high school—a reputation for being fast. Soul kissing, and playing around. It was December, two weeks before Christmas vacation, on Monument Hill, across from the park. He had taken her to a movie, and later, giggling, she had suggested that they go to Monument Hill and look at the moon. He had tried to appear casual, but he had felt strange, going hot and cold all over, for he knew what happened on Monument Hill.

The moon hidden by dark, threatening clouds, and it was pitch black. Lying on the dead winter grass, trying to talk to her in the darkness, not sure what to do. Shirley, putting her arms around him, kissing him. Feeling her tongue in his mouth, flicking against his lips, putting his arms around her, pressing her against the dead winter grass, the spark fanned to white heat. Then, after, lying there, looking away from her, glad he couldn’t see her in the night. Feeling ashamed and not wanting to touch her, but the next morning examining his body in the mirror, feeling himself, proud of the few hairs on his chest. Yes, the very first time with a woman . . .

They were on the corner under the street lamp. The young men were gone. The snow had begun to fall, whirling and twisting in the arc of the street lamp, melting quickly on the street. “We can go into Tony’s Bar. It’s only a few doors down.”

The bar was warm and dim with cigarette smoke. The jukebox blared. Shirley looked around uncertainly at the old men leaning against the bar, the heavily painted, haggard women. Her brow was furrowed.

Sam led her to a table. It was new and shiny, not as he remembered it. Absently, he noticed a cigarette burn on the red plastic seat. He studied her in the light. Her eyebrows were arched in an unnatural line. There were slight bags under her eyes. Just a touch of lipstick. Except for these things, she was the same.

The waiter came over. Sam glanced at the unfamiliar face. "Ya sure you don't want nothin', Shirley?"

"No—no thanks, Sam. I've got to run in a few minutes. Janie Watson is watching the baby for me."

Sam raised his eyebrows. "Jes' a beer—a glass o' beer." He looked at her hard. "So yer married now, eh, Shirley?"

She giggled, but she didn't look at him. She fiddled with her hat. "It's an old story, Sam. I've been married four years." She giggled again, her voice rising. "Just an old married woman, that's all."

"Do I know the guy?"

"No—no, Sam, you don't. He moved into town after you left."

"Boy or girl, Shirl?"

"Boy. Three years old." She stopped giggling. "I'm very happy, Sam, very happy."

"That's swell. I'm glad to hear it." Sam leaned forward, his elbows on the shiny table. "We had some good times, didn't we, Shirley?"

She gave him a sharp glance. "Y-yes, I guess we did." Her glance moved away, toward the door.

"Being in yer algebra class was no fun—with all them kids."

She had her pocketbook on the table. She tapped it lightly with her red fingernails. "No—no, I guess it wasn't."

"Remember, Shirley?" Sam spoke evenly. "Remember the night we were on Monument—"

Shirley stood up nervously. She was biting her lip. She pushed at a strand of hair. Sam noticed that her dark hair looked dull, lifeless. "I—I've got to run, Sam. I promised Janie I'd be home by ten, and it's after that now. I've really got to go."

Sam didn't get up. "If ya gotta, ya gotta. S'long, Shirl, I'll see ya 'round."

"Good-bye, Sam."

His eyes followed her out of the bar. They moved back along the bar—the bar where he had sold papers twelve years before. Remodeled, the old Tony's Bar with its face lifted. The shiny, new tables made of Formica, not the old, scarred, wooden ones with the carved names and obscenities. The red plastic upholstered chairs instead of the straight-backed wooden ones. The blank, empty face of the television set, no longer the radio, and the bodyless voice of Rosey Rosewell announcing the Pirates games. But the bar was the same, only shined and polished. The vague faces of the old people, leaning heavily, they could be the same, only he didn't know. He glanced at the green, familiar Mellon calendar—the same. Tony's Bar. If only it had been the same—if only it had been different. So familiar and yet so strange, like walking into the house on Arch Street, and finding a woman who kissed him and talked to him, and yet a stranger he did not know. Time gone awry, It wouldn't surprise him to find Mrs. Zemblen in the back apartment with her cats and dogs, and Uncle Anthony, still caught in a web of immolation, feebly arguing with Reverend Jenks. Reverend Jenks . . .

Height, six feet. Complexion, ruddy. Hair, light brown. The minister without a church—smiling always with big, white teeth—his security, the frayed, once-white clerical collar. Aloof, quiet, with rosy red cheeks. To farmer's market . . . "My dear man, do you perchance have a surplus of vegetables? You will receive the bounty of the Lord. God will smile on you for your act of selflessness. You, kind sir, are a true Christian, in

the best meaning of the word. I thank you—” and he would come to the house on Arch Street, his arms heavy with fruits and vegetables, and he would smilingly give them to Mrs. Zemblen—gray Mrs. Zemblen—and then he wouldn’t worry about the rent for another week. He would sit with Uncle Anthony, next to the littered desk, arguing politics, and when he would leave, Uncle Anthony would bend double in silent laughter—laughing strangely with a stub of roll-your-own still in his toothless mouth. Aunt Martha would stand over him, moving her tongue from one side of her mouth to the other, shaking her finger and saying: “Go on now, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, laughing at the Reverend.” Then she crossed herself, shaking her head vigorously. “He is a minister of God, even if he does do funny things. He has to live, too. Look at you, you lazy bum! Waiting for the Republicans to get in! At least Reverend Jenks goes out and gets food. Wake up, old man! Don’t you know everything is Democrats and Roosevelt?” The laughter would stop. Uncle Anthony’s shoulders bent even more, and in a whisper: “Roosevelt will lose the next time, just you wait and see.” He’d glance at the floor and be quiet for a long time.

Sam cracked his knuckles slowly, concentrating on each finger. He drained his glass of beer. Then he saw the man limp in. He went to the end of the bar, past Sam, and ordered a beer. Sam got up quickly. “Hey, Oscar!”

The man was small, thin. He looked inquiringly at Sam, a hopeful, eager expression on his face. Then he grinned. It was a half-grin, as if part of his mouth was paralyzed. “Well, me-oh-my, if it ain’t Sam! Hah! This is a surprise. I didn’t recognize you right off. You’ve been away a long time.” Sam hadn’t realized how small Oscar was, barely five feet tall. He looked down at the large bald spot on the top of his head, flecked with dandruff. “You bin in the Navy, Sammy boy?”

“Yeah, an’ New York fer a while.”

Oscar looked up at Sam, shaking his head. “Me-oh-my, how you’ve grown up, Sammy. Well—yes, yer a real man now. A real grown man. Me-oh-my!”

Sam leaned against the bar. “So how you makin’ out, Oscar?”

“Oh, y’know, Sammy, all the time. I’m well-known here on the North Side—almost an institution. I git ‘em all—even better than when you were here. Y’know how things git around. I’ve got a reputation fer bein’ darn good. Oh, yes, me-oh-my!”

A young boy in tight blue jeans walked up to Oscar and whispered something to him. Then he moved away.

Oscar gave Sam the half-grin. “Well, uh—I’ve got to take off for a few minutes, Sam. The boy that was just here. I’ll be right back. D’ya mind waiting?”

“I’ll be around fer a while.”

Everyone knew Oscar. The kids in the alleys. The twelve-year-old newsboys. The young men in front of the drugstore. And Sam knew, too. The first time, when he was thirteen. But it wasn’t just Sam that night. There was Danny Gardella, the Italian boy, who was married and had a little girl. Giving Sam the razz. “Whassa matter, Sam? Ain’t ya never had a blow job? Naw, I guess not. Yer still wet behind the ears. Christ, doncha know you ain’t a man till ya get a piece of ass and a blow job? Y’know that Oscar is damned good, almost as good as my wife, ha ha! A gang of us is goin’ up the hill with Oscar tonight. Ya kin come along if ya ain’t chicken . . . if ya ain’t chicken . . .” And Sam had tried to act unconcerned, and said, yeah, he’d come, since he hadn’t had nothin’ for a while . . .

Then the night, with the moon full and shining down. Not watching as Oscar did it to the other guys, feeling sick to the stomach, rubbing his hands in the dirt and pulling apart a blade of grass. Danny Gardella grinning, winking at Sam, and pushing at Oscar's head, and then the moment came, it was his turn. Danny nudging the other fellows, making them watch, and Sam closed his eyes against the grinning faces and the large moon, but he couldn't close his ears to their wise remarks. Lying there, biting his lip, his face red in the pale moonlight, and then he felt it in his loins, moving down to his knees, his toes, consuming his body. The ineffable sensation overwhelming him, unbearable, frightened by the wonder of it, almost crying, then the undreamt-of climax, spewing forth, feeling that his insides had come out. Then the aftermath, a dazed, frightened, awe-struck boy, lying on the grass on Monument Hill, looking up at the full moon, and the grinning faces . . .

Oscar was back, limping up to the bar. He half-grinned at Sam. "That was nice, me-oh-my, yes! I like 'em young and tender!"

"What d'ya git outta it?" Sam's voice was tense.

Oscar shrugged his shoulders. "Uh—all I know is that I like it. I bin this way since I was a kid. I—I blew my brother Andy when I was nine years old. I guess yer born that way!"

Sam took a deep drag off his cigarette. "How d'ya figure somethin' like that? It don't make no sense. It's crazy—it ain't right." Sam dropped his cigarette butt to the floor. He ground it into the dirty sawdust. Leaning against the bar, he bent his head, staring hard at the half-empty glass of beer. "The whole deal is cockeyed," he said slowly. "When I was in the Navy, there was a Chief Petty Officer that went down on me once. Well, ya coulda knocked me over when I found out he was married with two kids. I felt like beltin' the bastard. He got killed. He's a helluva lot better off!"

"Oh, I don't know—I don't know," Oscar said. "You'd be surprised. You would, Sam! There are a lot of people that way, me-oh-my, yes! Look at all them movie stars. I've got a friend who's bin around in Hollywood, and he tol' me that most of 'em are queer. He says they have all those mad parties where everyone does everything to everyone else. He tol' me a lot of things. He says that all those marriages are put-up jobs—that they just get married to cover up. He really knows the score."

Sam finished his beer. "I'm takin' off. I'll see ya, Oscar!"

"Yer goin'? Me-oh-my! Uh, er—would you like to drop up to my place? I live right around the corner."

"Naw. I gotta go."

"Well—all right, Sam. But I hang out here. You can always find me here, Sam. Good-bye!"

"Yeah."

Sam pushed open the door of the room on the second floor. It was the room that Reverend Jenks had lived in. It was small, with just enough room for the single bed and dresser. A full-length mirror was attached to the closet door. The high, narrow window was barred. It gave Sam an uncomfortable, close feeling. He thought of Aunt Martha, sitting downstairs in the clustered apartment, magnifying glass to eye, studying her dream book, and the pad and pencil in front of her with the numbers on it.

The room was chilly and damp, a far cry from Julia Englestone's Madison Avenue apartment. Sam undressed quickly, stripping to the nude. He rubbed his hands together, he rubbed his arms, his chest. He looked at himself in the full-length mirror.

He tensed the muscles of his well-rounded arms. He took a deep breath, pulling in his stomach as much as he could. He noted with satisfaction its flatness. He ran his hand through the sparse black hair on his chest. He smiled into the mirror. Somehow, it didn't look just right. He moved his head slightly, still smiling. He relaxed. He was satisfied.

He switched off the light and jumped into bed. He pulled the covers high, up to his chin. They felt damp and smelled of age—of mothballs. He lay in the dark, eyes open, thinking of being home at last, the people, the places. The cat-and-dog smell of the hall downstairs. Shirley Davis married now. Slim on the corner. The young men leaning against the lamppost in front of the drugstore. The newsboy in the oversize orange sweater and the tennis shoes. Tony's Bar. And Oscar. The same . . . different. Wondering, thinking . . .

Finally, Sam fell asleep.

“Harriet” Johnson’s

DURING THAT HOT, muggy summer, I worked nights as a soda jerk at Howard Johnson’s on Sixth Avenue in Greenwich Village. The air conditioner never worked, so the temperature was always in the nineties. The waiters had it worse than I did: they wore bow ties, and their uniforms—pale green jackets with gold buttons—were usually stained by a mixture of sweat and “27 Flavors” of ice cream. Many nights, Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, their faces tinged a sickly yellow by the fluorescent lights, would be deep in conversation in one of the sagging tangerine booths.

In the afternoons, I took a writing class at the New School for Social Research so that I could perfect my novel, which was based on my rough childhood on Pittsburgh’s North Side. Afraid that no one would publish it if I told the truth, I made the main character heterosexual, and when I felt the book was ready, I sent the manuscript to an editor at Dial Press. One day, about six weeks later, I received a form-letter rejection in the mail. I was so upset that I channeled Jack London and stormed into the editor’s office, demanding that he talk to me. He threatened to call the police.

Needless to say, I was in a lousy mood that night at Howard Johnson’s. I must have checked my watch at least a thousand times. Finally it was one o’clock—time to close up. But then, a few minutes later, I was cleaning chocolate-chip ice cream from my right forearm when I saw a limousine pull up to the curb outside. A bulky man with a gangster’s swagger jumped out and burst through the glass front door.

“Gimme a pistachio and a peppermint stick!” the man said. “Cones. Make ’em large.”

“Sir,” I answered politely, “We’ve been closed for ten minutes.”

“You’re not closed,” he insisted. “The door is open.”

“The head waiter must have forgotten to lock it at one o’clock sharp, sir.”

The man had the unblinking eyes of an owl. “Boy, do you know who the pistachio cone is for?”

“No, sir,” I said.

He pointed to the limo. “See the man in the front seat? That’s Walter Winchell.”

I knew he was telling the truth. First of all, Winchell’s milky-white face and brown fedora were easily recognizable. He was the most powerful gossip columnist of the day, maybe of all time. His six-day-a-week column in *The New York Daily Mirror* was syndicated in over two thousand newspapers and read by fifty-five million people. As a young man, he had been an avid supporter of Roosevelt’s New Deal, but he had grown more and more conservative as he grew older. He supported Joe McCarthy’s Red Scare, and liked to call the left-leaning *New York Post* “the Compost.” He was also famously anti-gay. At a time when even the hint that someone might be a homosexual could lead

to a shattered career or even suicide, Winchell outed men, according to St. Clair McKelway's 1940 book *Gossip*, with "crystal clear euphemisms."

Second of all, I knew what Winchell looked like because he often came in and sat at my counter. One night I told him that I was dying to see the movie *Salt of the Earth*, and he said that I would probably have to die because it had been banned in the United States. Then he bragged, "I was instrumental in banning it. The star, Will Geer, is a pinko." His bloodless lips parted to lick his pistachio ice cream, and I could have sworn his tongue was green.

The man from the limo figured that Winchell's name would get him what he wanted, but I didn't budge. "I know who he is," I said. "He always sits at my station, and he calls me George."

"Well, hurry up, George! Walter gets what he wants. Do it now!"

"I already told you, sir. We're closed!"

The man looked stunned. "Nobody—but nobody—turns down Walter Winchell," he said.

"I guess there's always a first time, sir." I didn't know where I got the courage.

The man's face turned purple. "A pissant like you is . . . The manager! I wanna see him—now!"

"I am the manager," I said. I prayed that Emile, the real manager, wouldn't choose this moment to emerge from his office in the basement.

"You're the manager?"

I couldn't stop the words that jumped out of my mouth. "You catch on quick, sir!"

He reached into his jacket, and I was sure he was going to pull out a gun. But instead, he turned around and stomped out the door. To see what he would do next, I walked to the front of the restaurant and peered through the window. He was talking to Winchell through the limo's passenger-side window. Winchell took off his fedora and glared at me. I gulped nervously. Then I locked the door and hid in the basement.

A week later, Tony Franciosa, who was one of the waiters, showed up waving *The Daily Mirror* over his head. (Tony was in rehearsal for *A Hatful of Rain* on Broadway; we knew that he would be a star when he started dating Shelley Winters.)

"Right here in Winchell's column! The son of a—! He calls this place 'Harriet Johnson's' and says it's a hangout for 'vag-lewd' types."

"Vag-lewd?" I asked.

Tony slammed the paper down on the counter. "They can't print the word 'fag' in the paper."

There was no doubt in my mind: Winchell had run the item because I turned him down for a lousy ice-cream cone.

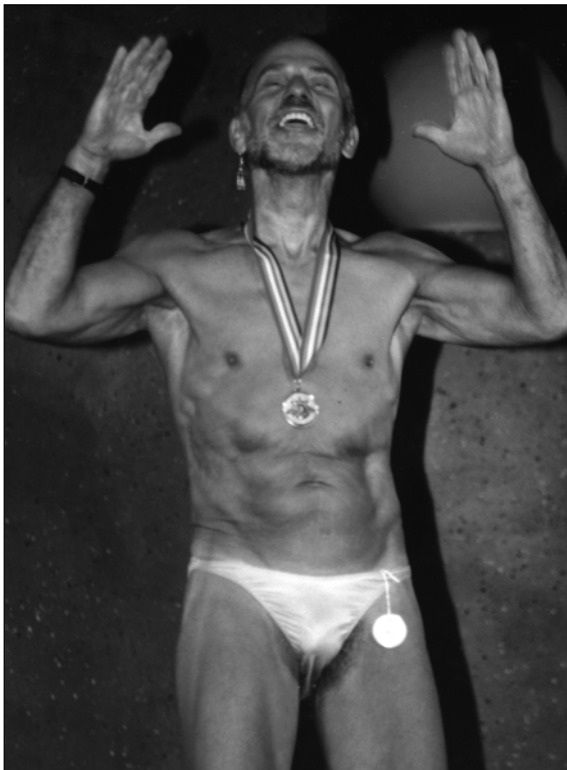
But Winchell surely could not have predicted what happened next. Because of his one-liner (and his other "Harriet Johnson's" references that followed), gay men and lesbians began flocking to the restaurant. Then straight tough guys from Brooklyn and the Bronx invaded the eatery, doing their best to pick fights. Nancy, the cashier, called the police at first, but eventually New York's Finest stopped responding, so the franchise owner hired Artie Levine, an ex-boxer, as a bouncer. Artie—with the help of the gay and lesbian clientele—would beat up the toughs and leave them lying in the gutter in a river of blood. I hated the violence, but something incredible had happened: the sleepest, deadest place in the Village was suddenly the center of the action! One Saturday night, a

heavyset lesbian in full male drag with a blonde bombshell on her arm was attacked by a hood in a leather jacket, and the restaurant erupted in a frenzy of flying chairs and dishes as she beat the daylights out of the guy. Business was so great that we stayed open on the weekends until 4: 00 A.M. My tips tripled.

But that's not the biggest debt I owe to Winchell. Because as I watched the scene unfolding night after night, I realized that I had created it. I felt so empowered that I abandoned my tedious heterosexual novel and began writing plays—plays inspired by the real live people I met at the restaurant. Before long I was studying with Uta Hagen. My big break came when my (very gay) play *Daddy Violet* was produced at the Caffè Cino on Cornelia Street. As a result, in 1969, I became the first openly gay person to receive a Rockefeller Grant.

The Daily Mirror closed in 1963, and Winchell retired shortly thereafter. He spent his final years as a recluse at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, and died of prostate cancer at the age of seventy-four. His daughter was the only mourner to attend his burial.

I'm eighty-three now, and in September, 2007, my newest play, *Viagra Falls*, will receive a concert presentation at La MaMa E.T.C. in the East Village as part of a series funded by the New York Commission of the Arts. I would love to go back to "Harriet" Johnson's, sit at the counter, and order a pistachio ice-cream cone in honor of Walter Winchell, the man who changed my life. Alas, it is no longer there.



George won the Over-Sixty gold medal for Bodybuilding in the 1990 Gay Games III, in Vancouver.

Photographer unknown

Of Love and S&M

Originally Published in *Drummer*, 1977

I went to my first psychiatrist in the Fifties. "I'm nuts about rugged men with husky builds," I told him. "A lot of them are straight, and a lot of them look like my father. He had huge biceps. Do you think that means anything?"

Of course the psychiatrist refused to answer my question, but—

Back and forth from New York to Los Angeles looking for Mr. Right, with stopovers in Chicago, Des Moines, and San Francisco. I either hitched or took the bus—once I caught a freight train in Tucumcari when I was stranded on the highway with twenty-five other hitchhikers.

1959n

I WAS THIRTY-SIX years old when I met Mick Sands in the S&M bar on Santa Monica Boulevard, across from the cemetery in Hollywood. I had hitched in from Santa Monica, where I worked as a waiter at Smokey Joe's. I hated the job—the only thing nice about it was the cowboy outfit—my uniform.

Now I stood at the back of the S&M bar with my legs spread wide. I tightened my buttocks and pulled in my stomach. Before I entered the bar I made sure that my penis hung from the right side of my Levis—it looked bigger that way. My cowboy shirt was unbuttoned to show off my hairy chest.

It was early but I kept my eyes open for a score. The night before I'd gone home with an actor who had a featured role on a T.V. sitcom. I had pretended I was rough trade—he gave me fifteen dollars.

I leaned against the wall—I tucked my thumbs into the pockets of my Levis. I felt a calm, steady hatred for everyone in the bar. "Nothing but a bunch of faggots dressed up in leather," I muttered to myself. "Shit! I know they're trying to act like real working men, but they don't fool me—they're nothing but pencil pushers and ribbon clerks who wear suits and ties all day. Hell, I was brought up in the streets—I know a real working man when I see one."

I chugged my beer and bought another one. I wondered what I was doing in the stupid bar in the first place. After all, I knew what I really wanted was a piece of rough trade—even a Hollywood Boulevard hustler would do. I was horny as hell and I had the fifteen dollars from the actor—it was burning a hole in my pocket.

I finished my beer and started out the door. I stopped dead in my tracks when I saw the man with the crewcut. I wondered if he had walked into the bar by mistake—he wasn't my idea of what a gay guy looked like—I was sure he was straight trade. I don't think he was a day over thirty, but was gray at the temples and he glowed with confidence. He was in good shape—he had wide, powerful shoulders, a deep chest, and

the chin of a fighter. On his well-rounded biceps was a black panther—a boa constrictor was wrapped around it—they were in mortal combat.

I had never made a pass at a guy in a gay bar before. Even when I saw a guy I was attracted to, I had been too ashamed to approach him. I had always stood alone, sneering and defiant, pretending I was straight—that I was somehow superior to all the gay men around me. I would wait for someone to approach me—to admire me and buy me a beer.

I couldn't stand it any longer—I was scared to death that someone would pick him up and I'd never see him again. On shaky legs I crossed the bar. "Uh—hi!" I blurted. "Uh—I—I'm George."

His face was hard and cold. "What?"

I giggled self-consciously as I stared at my cowboy boots. "I said, uh—I'm, uh—I'm George."

"Mick." His voice was flat—he stared at me with his huge, expressionless eyes.

"Uh—how you doin'?" I tried to smile through stiff lips.

"I'm okay." There was an impatient tilt to his head.

"Uh—can I buy you a beer?"

He held up the bottle of Schlitz. "I've got a full one."

"Oh." I gritted my teeth and tried to muster up my courage—I knew I couldn't stop now. "Uh—you're damned good-looking." I giggled again and felt like an idiot, but I didn't stop. "I, uh—you're one of the handsomest men I've even seen in my life. I'm crazy about you, and I—" I took a deep breath. "Shit—you tie me up!"

There was a carefully restrained ferocity on his face. "I'd love to tie you up."

I felt the sparks jump through my body. "You—you would?"

"Sure I would. Where do you live?"

"Uh—Santa Monica, but I don't have a car, dammit. It's, uh—"

"We'll grab a cab." He pushed me towards the door. "Let's get out of here."

We found a taxi at Melrose and Highland. As we drove toward Santa Monica, I felt myself leaning toward him. I tried to make small talk, but all I got was a "yes" or a "no," and I finally gave up. We drove in silence.

I had a rented room in a bungalow that belonged to an elderly couple, a Mr. and Mrs. Horstmeyer. I was nervous, as I had never brought anyone home with me before and it was still early. I heaved a sigh of relief when I unlocked the front door—the living room was dark.

Once in my room Mick didn't waste any time. In a quiet voice he told me to take off my clothes. "Lie down on the bed—on your stomach." He opened the closet door. "Do you have any rope?"

My stomach lurched. "Gee! I don't have any."

"Where do you keep your ties?"

"What do you want a tie for?" I asked as I took off my pants.

He gave me an angry look. "So I can tie you to the bed."

"Oh! Uh—no, I don't have any ties."

He grunted as he rummaged through a bureau drawer—as he grabbed a handful of cowboy neckerchiefs. Expertly he tied my hands and legs to the frame of the bed. "I'm not going to gag you, but if you start yellin' I'll have to." A droplet of sweat fell from his forehead as he began to take off his clothes.

He started by spanking my ass with the palm of his hand. At first it didn't hurt at all, but after a while I gritted my teeth against the pain. I was about to yell when he stopped. "It's nice and red," he whispered. "Nice and red."

I watched out of the corner of my eye as he grabbed his thick belt and wrapped it around his hand. I was boiling with excitement and a kind of dread.

I felt the coldness of the leather against my bare back—it sent a chill up my spine. At first the belt was like a caress. Slowly the tempo of the strokes increased until the belt whistled through the air—it landed on my buttocks with a loud, smacking noise—over and over—harder and harder—I didn't think he would ever stop.

I pressed my face into the pillow—my body flooded with unbearable pain. I began to weep in great, jolting sobs. Suddenly, sheer panic seized me. I realized I was totally helpless and alone—at the mercy of a total stranger. What if he beat me to death?

And then he stopped. I could hear the faint sound of traffic on the street outside—the ticking of the clock on the mantle.

I felt his mouth on my back—his lips brushed the burning hotness of my buttocks. "Baby, baby," he breathed. "Black and blue, black and blue."

He was on top of me, licking my neck and shoulders—kissing my back.

My body glowed and tingled.

It was heart-stopping—one second the fierce brutality of the whipping, and the next second terrifying tenderness.

Now his body slithered over me—he pushed my legs apart, and with a sudden thrust he was inside me.

Whirling lights banged inside my head—the fire flamed my stomach—my chest—down to my toes. My body twisted and I screamed in an agony of release.

He bit into the back of my neck. He began to sob as he body jerked in orgasm.

He lay on top of me. He stopped crying and his body was motionless. I wondered if the wetness on the back of my neck was from spittle or tears.

As far as I was concerned, he could lie on top of me all night. I felt safe and secure. After a few minutes I dozed.

The bed shook as he jumped to the floor. "You okay?" he asked as he untied me.

I rubbed my wrists—I nodded my head and looked at him adoringly. He went to the bathroom and took a quick shower. Then he got into bed—in less than a minute, he was sound asleep and snoring.

I put my head on his chest and closed my eyes. His arms went around me in his sleep—he grunted as he pulled me close. I felt a tingling in my heart. I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt—I was in love with Mick Sands.

The next morning when I took a shower, I examined the welts on my back and buttocks. "I hope they never go away," I said to myself. I stared in the mirror for a long time before I finally got dressed.

When we walked through the living room, Mrs. Horstmeyer was reading the morning paper. She jumped to her feet—the blood drained from her face. "I—I—" she stammered. "I—I want you out of my house by the end of the week—on Saturday. I want you out."

"I'll be out—today. Right after I have breakfast." I slammed the front door. "Did you see the way she looked at me?" I said to Mick. "Like I'm some kind of a monster or something."

"Like you're some kind of a queer," he corrected.

After we had breakfast Mick helped me find another room. It didn't take long—I traveled light with only a battered tin suitcase.

We spent the afternoon on the beach at Santa Monica. I told Mick all about myself—all my dreams of becoming a famous writer. No matter how hard I tried, I still couldn't get him to talk about himself. I figured he must be hiding something—I wondered if he was married or in the service. He looked like he might be a mechanic or an engineer because he had strong, capable-looking hands.

As the sun went down into the ocean, he told me where he lived—New York City. He said he was catching a plane at ten o'clock that night. He wrote down his address. "If you're ever in New York, look me up—I mean it."

He climbed aboard the bus that took him to the airport—he didn't wave or look back. I watched the bus disappear into the distance.

It was only then that I felt the hollowness, the emptiness. I grabbed for the lamp post. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, but I couldn't stop the feeling of overwhelming desolation and loneliness—it was like a gray shroud choking me to death.

I was supposed to work a ten-hour night shift at Smokey Joe's, but I called and told them I was sick. I hitched to the S&M bar and got rip-roaring drunk. It was just about closing time when the big guy with the motorcycle helmet under his arm walked up to me. "Hey, cowboy, how you doin'?" He grinned and winked at me.

"I'm doin' okay," I mumbled as I looked the other way.

"Did you enjoy your night with Mick Sands?"

My heart thumped in my chest. "You know Mick Sands?"

"Sure I know him. I know him from the Silver Dollar in New York City."

"What's the Silver Dollar?"

"It's an S&M bar back there."

"I see." I felt a surge of happiness. I realized that Mick wasn't married and he hadn't lied to me—he was from New York.

"Mick Sands." He shook his head slowly. "Do you know something? He's the only guy who ever whipped my ass."

"Oh?"

"I gotta say, he's a great S." He looked me up and down, smiling. "You're a real beauty. That Mick really knows how to pick his masochists." He patted me on the buttocks. "Is your ass nice and sore?"

"Get the fuck away from me!" The anger tore at my chest—it made me sick to my stomach. "You got it all wrong. We didn't do nothing like that. We—"

"Okay, cowboy, okay!" He backed away. "It's no skin off my ass."

"Shit!" I bolted for the door. The skin on the back on my neck prickled with embarrassment and shame. Everyone in the bar had heard him call me a masochist. "Just because I was with Mick doesn't mean—hell—there's something special between us—I'm in love with Mick—that doesn't make me a masochist, for crying out loud."

I walked a couple of miles before I finally stuck out my thumb—I wanted to get home to my room in Santa Monica. It was easy getting a ride late at night in Hollywood—there was always someone cruising around in a car looking for action.

The green sedan skidded to a stop. The driver had a hawk nose and a brown fedora pulled down over his eyes. "Would you like to come to my place?" he asked bluntly. "I've got plenty of beer and liquor."

"Some other time," I answered. "I've got to get home—Santa Monica."

"Hop in. I'll take you a few blocks."

I had barely slammed the door when he groped me. "Do you mind, young man?"

"Be my guest." I lit a cigarette in my best Bogart imitation and looked out the window. I loved to pretend I was straight trade.

"Mmmm—you've got a nice-sized one. What if we pull off somewhere? I'll take care of you—it will only take a few minutes."

"Naw! You know how the cops are in Hollywood. They—"

"I know a safe place," he interrupted. "It's only a few blocks from here."

"We better not."

"I'll pay you."

"Oh?"

"Ten dollars."

"Well—"

He turned the corner and pulled into the Shell gas station. "It's pitch-black here—nothing to worry about," he said as he turned off the motor and the headlights. He unzipped my fly and went down on me.

He wasn't very good at it. After a few minutes I went soft. He kept trying but it wasn't any use—I couldn't get it up. "Uh—I guess I had one too many beers," I apologized.

He sat up and wiped his mouth with a white handkerchief. "That's okay. Button up your trousers. I'll take you home."

"You will?"

"I know how you straight guys are," he said. "I'll bet you're going to get hell from the little old lady when you get home."

I shrugged. "How did you know? I'm not wearing a ring."

"It's written all over you." As I got out of the car he held out a five-dollar bill. "Will this be enough, considering the fact you couldn't, uh—"

"Forget it." I felt a sudden anger burn my chest. "I don't want money."

Back in my room, I tried to sleep but I couldn't. I went into the tiny bathroom and sat on the toilet. I thought of Mick Sands tying me down to the bed and before I knew it, I was masturbating. In less than a minute I had an orgasm that was almost as good as the real thing.

I went back to bed, but I still couldn't sleep. It was almost dawn when I grabbed pen and paper and wrote Mick a letter. I told him I wanted to come to New York and live with him. "All you have to do is whistle and I'll come running," I wrote. "I can't stand it without you."

I spent the time keeping as busy as I could. I had long workouts at the gym—I worked extra shifts at Smokey Joe's. I wrote Mick at least one letter a day, and—I didn't go near the S&M bar on Santa Monica Boulevard.

I finally got a letter from Mick. He wrote that he lived in a one-bedroom apartment on the Lower East Side and I was welcome to share it with him. He continued, "I'm a medical doctor with my degree, George. I'm working at the V.A.

Hospital here in Manhattan. I'm in residency for my specialty in ophthalmology. I've got a year before I go into practice. I have long hours and very little money."

I wrote back that I'd come to New York as quickly as I could get there. "I can get a job at Howard Johnson's in the Village as a counterman. I've worked there before and they always take me back." I also wrote that I wanted to get a tattoo—"just like the one you've got!"

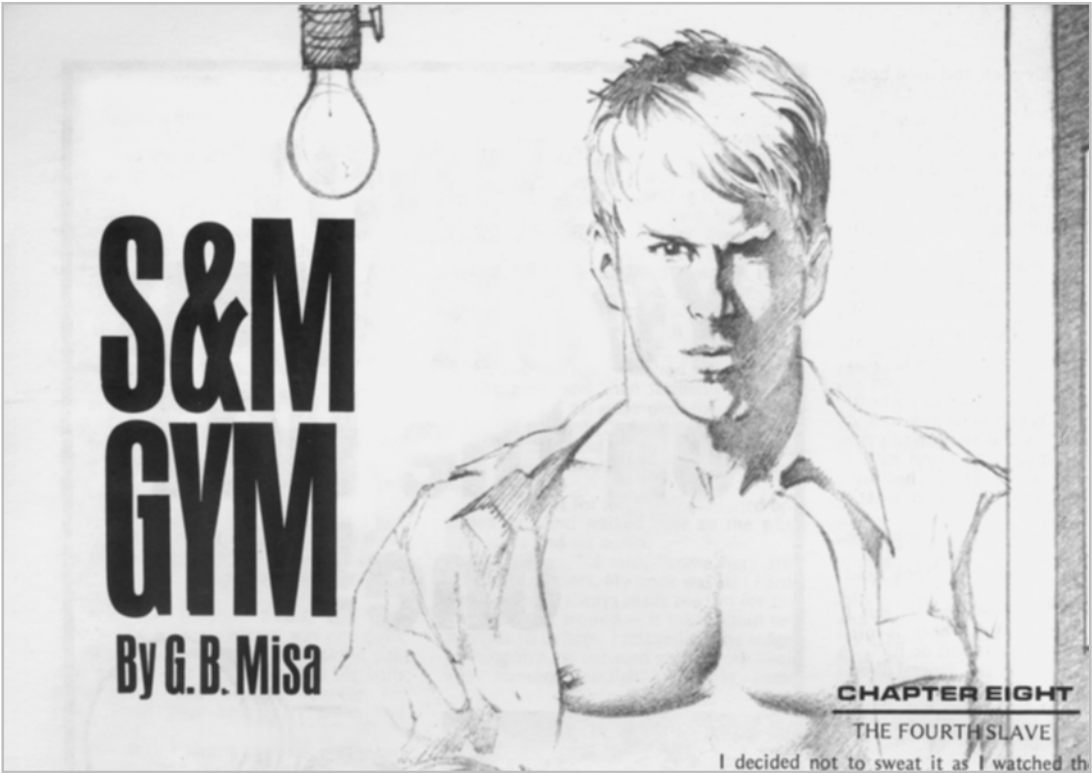
I floated on Cloud Nine as I dropped the Special Delivery letter to Mick into the mailbox.

His answer was short and to the point. "Get a tattoo on your left biceps before you leave. Only a black panther—nothing else."

That evening I hitched to Main Street in downtown Los Angeles. I had a few beers and then I got my tattoo—a black panther on my left biceps. It took a few days for it to scab over—it healed in about ten days.

I packed my tin suitcase—I caught the Greyhound to Indio in the Mojave Desert. I wanted to get away from the freeways, but especially the L.A. cops.

I stuck out my thumb. I was on my way to New York and Mick Sands.



S&M GYM

Originally Published in *Drummer*, 1978
by "G.B. Misa"

Drummer catered to a worldwide subscription base of aficionados of sado-masochism. In 1978, the publishers of the magazine announced that a vanity edition of the complete story would be forthcoming, but it never materialized. The excerpt presented here is taken from Parts 11 and 12.

THE CHERUB-FACED BEAUTY with the body of a giant stumbled into the bedroom. He whirled around, gulping nervously, his Adam's apple jerking up and down. His emerald eyes were glued to my belt. "Have, uh—have you ever beaten a guy with that before?" He licked his lips, almost in anticipation.

"See the notches in it?" My voice was low, full of menace. "That's for the three dudes I whipped to death."

His fascination increased. "You're kidding, aren't you?" His voice quavered with fear.

I stared at him hard, a twisted sneer on my face. I had to admit he was an authentic beauty. His short, black hair was parted on the left side with a cowlick in the back. He wore overalls, work shoes, and he had the most innocent-looking face of any twenty-five-year-old I'd ever seen. There was "country boy" written all over him. He was a big motherfucker, but I knew I could handle him—in fact, I knew I could get him to do anything I wanted. It was written all over him. "Get me some rope, asshole!" I barked.

"Uh—rope?"

"What the fuck—you still got cowshit in your ears?"

"Oh, uh—I don't have any rope. What, uh—what are you going to do?"

"What the fuck do you think I'm going to do?"

His tongue nervously wet his upper lip. "I, uh—I don't know."

I'd hit it right on the button. It was obvious. Li'l Abner was not a San Francisco boy. "How long you bin in town?" I asked, almost kindly.

"Uh—'bout a week."

"Where you from?"

"Des Moines."

"Where the fuck is that—in France?"

"Iowa." He cleared his throat.

I was beginning to get turned on. "You've never been tied up before, have you?"

"Uh, well—I've thought of it—had this idea in my head—but when it got right down to it, I—"

"I don't want your fuckin' life story. You want your ass beat or not?"

His knees were shaking so badly that he sat on the edge of the bed. For a moment I thought he was going to cry. "I never had my ass whipped," he confessed. "It was, uh—when I saw you walkin' down the street, lookin' so great—well—what I said to you about beatin' my tail just popped outta my mouth—you know?"

His Midwestern twang was a big turn-on. But even more than that was the obvious fact that I had me a virgin masochist—actually the best kind, for he would take the S&M fantasy so seriously—so "life and death." I could feel my "big boy" straining against my blue jeans. "I'll break you in easy," I said. "Get out of those clothes. That's an order."

"Oh, yes, sir!" He seemed eager to please. My eyes devoured his body as he stripped. Christ, he had a better body than I'd realized. Maybe it was because his skin was thin and very white—I dunno—but his muscles bulged. He was a real Li'l Abner. But then I saw his ass, and the film of passion grabbed at my eyes, making everything a kind of translucent red. His buns seemed to defy gravity—two solid hunks of meat muscling upward. His almost hairless legs, thick like tree trunks, and his big, flat feet. Wow!

Jerking at my belt, I doubled it and smacked it hard across the palm of my hand. His body shook, as if I'd been smacking his virgin ass. "Turn around, Li'l Abner," I ordered.

The front side of the country-boy giant was even more terrific than his back. My rock-hard dick was dying to escape from the tight confines of my blue jeans as my eyes ate up his almost hairless body. Huge shoulders cutting down to a tiny waist, and a dribble of sweat oozing from his navel. And a big, uncut dick that quivered in the air. Again I smacked the palm of my hand with the belt, and he jumped a foot into the air. I bent over, roaring with laughter. "Hey, take it easy, country boy!"

"I, uh—guess I'm, uh—sort of nervous!"

"You too scared to take off your master's pants and shoes?"

"Oh, no, sir!" he said eagerly. With lightning quickness, he performed his job. My dick popped out of my blue jeans and slapped him across the face. I flopped back on the bed. "Clean out my bunghole!" I ordered.

He did a good job, not complaining at the sloppiness, as it was still full of the juices of the black dude. Then I grabbed him by the ears and shoved his face down on my stiff prick. He was a damned good cocksucker—he must've been sucking off some of the country boys back home in Iowa. I began slowly—gently—almost caressing his back with the leather belt—barely tapping his beautiful butt—his white skin—ever so gentle—making love to him with the leather—real leather love, and I could feel his body responding to the smooth touch of the soft leather—the tenderness of the belt—then a very light smack—a kind of love-tap on his left bun—not even a mark yet—over and over and over—then a barely perceptible pink glow like on a baby's ass—yeah, his ass just like a baby's—tap—tap—on and on—then a bit harder—his body getting in the groove—beginning to shiver in delight to the cadence of the leather belt—and yes, I was starting him on the memorable journey that he'd never forget—I would take him to the

heights for the first time in his life—and I knew—I knew Li'l Abner would never forget me, because I was initiating him into the mystery of leather.

My rock-hard dick still in his mouth and his low moan of ecstasy—his butt pushing upward, meeting the leather belt—begging for more. Since I needed more leverage, I pulled my dick out of his mouth. Spreading my legs wide, I put my foot on his back—my belt now poised high in the air—now slamming down, smashing hard against his butt—tearing now, ripping at his ass. No more the light touch of pink—violence beginning to be etched into his perfect, hairless butt—now the outline of the belt in a symphony of colors—blue-orange—black with purple edges, and I could feel the pulse beat of my sperm, tingling out of my asshole and into my balls—Jesus!

“Beautiful motherfuckin’ ass!” I moaned.

“Oh, don’t stop—don’t—”

Quickly I turned the belt around and—swoosh!—without losing a motion, I let him have it on his once-unscarred ass with the belt buckle—and now it was tearing—ripping into the milk-white muscles, and—wow!—the blood oozing and trickling, and still Li'l Abner demanding more—wanting more as his buns pushed upward—begging—asking for more and more, and he got more and more!

My arm felt like it was going to fall off, but we were in a rhythm—the belt zinging through the air, and his ass—up—meeting the belt buckle. Finally, I let go of the belt and buried my face in the kid’s ass. My mouth pressed into the burning-hot skin—I licked at the tender, torn flesh—my tongue finding the puckered, quivering asshole of Li'l Abner. Then I jammed my tongue into the hotness of his butt, and he screamed in passion. I had his legs high in the air and he grabbed my hand, trying to push it all the way up his ass. “Oooooow!” he moaned.

I didn’t want him to shoot off, so I stopped abruptly. “Vaseline,” I growled.

“What?” I could see reality come back into his eyes. “What are you gonna do?”

I slapped him hard across the face. “Get the fuckin’ Vaseline, asshole!” I screamed.

Like a wild animal he crawled the three feet to the bathroom, and a few seconds later he crawled back with a tube of KY. “Are you really—gonna do that to me?” Just by the way he spoke the words, I knew he loved being scared to death—that it was a big turn-on.

“One guess, cocksucker!” I slapped a ton of KY on his hot hole and then smeared a bunch of it on my hand. I coated my arm with the greasy guck—all the way to my elbow.

“Oh—holy mackerel! You’re not—all the way to your elbow?” His eyes were big with fear.

“Shut up and bend over!”

His tree-trunk thighs were quivering. “I’ve, uh—holy Toledo!—I’ve never, uh—”

“Had a fist up your ass?” I finished the sentence for him.

“Master, I—uh—I’ve never had nothin’ up there—no kind of foreign object before.”

My mouth fell open in surprise. “You’re tryin’ to tell me you’re a fuckin’ virgin?”

His voice was low, embarrassed. “Yes, Master, I almost took an enema once, but I couldn’t stand the nurse trying to put that rubber whatchamacallit up my—”

“Shut yer fuckin’ yack,” I stormed. “You are about to get de-virginized!”

I was so turned on, I felt the drool on my chin. A virgin—this gorgeous hunk was a virgin! Tentatively, my index finger probed his pucker of a hole—wow! Jesus, it was tight as a chicken's ass. I worked slowly, and after a couple of minutes I managed to get two fingers into the sensitive opening, and Li'l Abner was crying softly. He screamed when I shoved my third finger into his love pit, so I quickly pulled out. I had a better idea of how to loosen him up. I slapped a gob of KY onto my dick. "Stand up!" I ordered.

"Yes, sir!" He stood on shaky legs.

"Grab your ankles, asshole!"

Obediently he bent over, and for a moment I stared at his gorgeous tush, savoring its contoured muscularity. Without warning I plowed my eight-inch dick into the virgin territory all the way up to the hilt, grabbing him around the middle in a vice-like grip so there was no way he could get unstuck. He screamed bloody murder and fought me for about thirty seconds, but then the scream turned to a whimper, and then somehow metamorphosed into a guttural sound of passion. Without taking my dick out, I twirled him around onto his back and threw his legs over my shoulders, and I poured it to him. Now he was pushing his ass up to meet my brutally demanding prick. Christ, it was like having my dick in an oven that was turned up to 550 degrees. I could feel the jizz pumping up out of my balls, so I pulled out quickly. "Please, sir," he whined. "Don't take your wonderful dick out of me—please put it back in, sir!"

Instead of my burning hot dick, he got four fingers inside his once-virgin ass—then quickly my thumb. I counted to three, and then shoved—his sphincter tightened, then opened up, and my hand was miraculously inside his virgin ass—right up to the wrist. His face was contorted in pain, and he lay back sobbing.

Pulling out my hand, I grabbed Li'l Abner around his slim waist and sat him down on my fat eight inches—slurp! Just like that—not even a squeal as he took my pistol all the way up to my balls. Now my hand twisted at his right nipple, but when my fingers tore at his left nipple, I felt his body quiver with desire. I had found his sex spot. I twisted harder, and he had his legs under him now and was pushing his ass up and down on my dick. "Fuck my ass, sir! Fuck my ass! All the way! Let me have it, sir! Holy Toledo!"

Shoving him off my rip-roaring hard-on, I let him fall on his back. Almost gently, I whacked him on the chest—on the left side—hitting the nipple. Then I noticed that his left nipple was larger than the right one. Curious to see how he'd react, I transferred my attention to his right nipple—twisting it brutally and beating it with the palm of my hand. No response. But when I started to slap away on his left nipple, he went crazy, moaning and groaning and twisting his body in ecstasy. "You're wonderful—oh, sir! You're just hunky-dory. Don't stop! Holy mackerel!"

Now it was time for my leather belt. I stood up to get more leverage—whistling the belt through the air, and now it red-welted his chest—I concentrated on the left side—every time the belt would come whistling through the air and leave a scarlet welt on his virgin body, he would gasp, and then his body would react to the whipping in a frenzy of whirling, twirling, ecstatic spasms—upwards—sideways—his country-boy face contorted in delicious pain, and then back to his original position, waiting, begging for more of the belt.

Now I knew it was time—the young man from Iowa was my complete, absolute slave—he'd eat my shit if I wanted him to. He was completely in my power—it was a wonderful feeling, as if I were on acid. I threw his legs over my shoulders. He didn't even know it when I got my fist in up to the wrist—his hand was playing with his torn left nipple—then there was a swoosh—a moment's pause—I had my arm into his virgin bunghole up to the elbow! Then he let go with an unearthly sound that was somehow full of tearing pain and fulfilled ecstasy at the same time, as his body jerked crazily on my arm and thick jets of jizz shot out of his swollen dickhead—the green veins of his cock looked like they would burst with cum—a geyser of semen—a fountain of youth spraying, splatting into arcs of passion, slamming against his face—into his hair—onto his chest—seemingly never-ending—and finally dribbling onto his patch of pubic hair.

Somehow he managed to get his furnace mouth down onto my exploding mushroom and I fell backwards, flashbulbs of multicolored lights exploding in my brain—my asshole—my toes—reverberating through my body—deep in my guts. Grabbing his head, I jammed my dick all the way down his throat—whew! My whole body concentrated, shooting out the essence of my being, of my manhood, into Li'l Abner's hungry mouth. I shot so much cum juice that it dribbled out of the side of his mouth—it was finally over.

After a moment, I took the sexy country boy in my arms and tenderly began to kiss his body. I started with his torn ass and kissed every black-and-blue mark I could find. Then I went to the cabinet in the bathroom, found some salve, and carefully ministered to his wounds. When I finished, I felt the tenderness, so I kissed him gently, lovingly.

"You're absolutely wonderful. I'll never forget you," he moaned.

I couldn't resist the wounded gladiator's body. A moment later, I had my prickhead up his ass and was pouring it to him. It had stretched for my arm, but now it was back in shape and tight as hell. It only took me a few minutes to shoot my load up his gorgeous ass, and as I pulled out I realized I was the first guy to deposit my spunk inside Li'l Abner's buns.

He was exhausted. I picked him up and put him to bed. His ass was so ripped up that he had to lie on his belly. I gave it a last kiss and then I tucked him in. "Sleep tight, and don't let the fleas bite!" I bent down and kissed him on the forehead.

"Goodnight, Daddy!" he said sleepily.

"Goodnight, Son!"

As I went out the door, I knew he wouldn't be able to sit down for a week, and every time he moved he'd think of me. Just thinking of his gorgeous virgin buns got me so hard I felt like going back and knocking off another piece. But I knew Li'l Abner was sleeping peacefully.

Once on Castro Street, I could feel the salty wind from the Bay, and cold reality grabbed at my soul. I glanced at my watch; it was only one o'clock in the morning. I wondered if Killer would have all his slaves out on the streets of San Francisco, looking for his runaway slave. I wondered if I should go back to the gym—go back to my master. And still the red-hot anger burned my throat. Killer McKenna—making me sleep in the locker room with the stink of dirty jockstraps and smelly socks.

The fresh air was a relief after being a prisoner for so many months. And the night was young. I decided—I'm going to have myself a ball—take out all the stops, and—fuck the Mr. Bay Area Contest! Anyway, it really didn't matter. After all, I had been replaced,

and the official entry of the Killer McKenna Gym was Thunder Cole. And why in hell should I worry about Killer McKenna and his gym? He could shove it up his ass for all I cared.

As I turned down Market Street and walked toward the Embarcadero, the thought smashed at my brain for the first time: the thought of dominating Killer McKenna—of shoving my arm up his ass—of beating him into submission—of making the great Killer my slave—well, just thinking about it was like a shock to my system. And—wasn't I nuts to even have such a thought? Wasn't it a kind of sacrilege? After all, Killer McKenna was the epitome of the macho male, the quintessence of rugged American masculinity. Trying to turn Killer McKenna into my slave was almost un-American, and yet—what a wild, mad experience that would be!

I shook my head, trying to rid myself of the fantasy. Market Street was almost empty of people, and it was desolate—dark except for an occasional neon sign. I passed an all-night grindhouse. I must've walked a couple of miles down the empty street, not passing a soul, down through the financial district—and then I hit the waterfront.

I glanced up at the sign: BA . . . the R had lost its neon red. Skid row personified as I shoved at the creaky door. Narrow and dank and dismal with a blank-eyed jukebox silent in the corner—the sign: OUT OF ORDER. Was this San Francisco nightlife? I knew I had to have a drink. I was about to order a draught beer when I saw the filthy glasses on the bar, so instead I ordered a bottle of Bud and a double shot of Carstairs. The greasy bartender looked like he hadn't taken a bath in a month. With the double shot in my guts I drank down the bottle of Bud, but suddenly I had a pounding headache at the base of my skull. "You got any aspirin?" I asked the bartender.

As the bartender shook his head, a man sitting on a barstool whirled around. "I'll see what I've got." He was about forty with dirty-blond hair. There was a touch of a smile on his face, showing off his beautiful teeth. He pulled out a pillbox. "Only got one left!"

It didn't look like an aspirin. It was smaller, but with all the new products coming out, I figured it was cool. After I swallowed it, I ordered another boilermaker. A few minutes later, the headache was gone and I felt terrific.

"How's your headache?" the dirty blond asked, stroking his square jaw.

"What headache?" I grinned. "Hey, where's the john?"

He pointed to the narrow, wooden steps that led down to the basement. Once I got downstairs, there was a labyrinth of cellar corridors. My body began to feel like it was full of electricity. I shoved out my chest—feeling the power of my body—of my weightlifter's physique. The only way I found the toilet was by smelling it out. The first time I pushed at the door it refused to open. Giving it a hard shove, I opened it about a foot, and a pale, white face popped out. It smiled vacantly and then disappeared. I felt the rattling of a chain and the door swung open as if by magic. I stepped across the threshold. I couldn't quite believe my eyes. The toilet was jam-packed like in the New York subway during rush hour. Big guys—little guys—old and young—most of them standing around watching—waiting—their eyes darting toward the urinal. It was the old-fashioned kind of urinal, a couple of feet off the floor. In reality, it was a trough—like for cows—and long enough to accommodate four guys.

Coming into the shithouse was almost like entering a theater. The large room had one naked light bulb—a 200-watter on the wall above the urinal. The rest of the room

was in shadows. Yes, the urinal was the stage, and there was a groovy show going on—quite a performance. Both of the dudes wore leather jackets over their bare torsos. The one on his knees wore a dog collar, and his master held the leash. The slave was licking his owner's boots. Some guy reached out and groped the master, but he slammed his fist into the guy's guts, and that was the end of that. A moment later, the master tugged at the leash, and they went out the door—the slave on his hands and knees.

The electricity inside my guts began to move to the rest of my body. I felt fantastic. I had to piss real bad, so I took center stage under the 200-watt bulb, hauling out my dick and getting ready to let fly a thick stream of piss in the general direction of the urinal. But before I could relieve myself, I felt hands desperately, frantically, grabbing at my legs, twisting my body around. I looked down into the face with the open mouth. I wondered why in hell they bothered with a real urinal when they had so many human toilets around. I figured I'd give the poor bastard a break. I leaned back against the urinal and let go with a stream of yellow-orange piss that splashed all over the kneeling cocksucker.

It was almost as if I was taking the energy from the light bulb over my head. I was grooving on the spotlight—eating up all the attention. One fat, old man was leaning up against the peeling wall, his eyes riveted to my dick—the spit dripping out of his mouth as he whacked away at his tiny dong. Three young guys down on their knees now in homage to me—at my feet. My pants jerked down below my knees as six hands grabbed at me. One guy kissed the dimples on my kneecaps. I felt a thick tongue run along the back of my leg—slide along the cheek of my buttocks, and finally find the crack of my ass—the wet hole—hands spreading my cheeks wide, and the thick tongue slurping up into my raunchy bunghole that was still sloppy wet with the hot jizz of the black O.J. Simpson look-alike. He grooved on the cum in my butt—eating it up—moaning.

I began to feel the pulse beat—at first imperceptible—almost unconscious—all of them turned into a kind of universal heartbeat—somehow panting together in unison—all of their hungry eyes eating up my body—their eyes caressing my eighteen-inch arms, my thirty-inch waist—I was their perfect fantasy—yeah, me—George B. Misa—every goddammed one of them feasting on my body—their eyes coated with admiration, adoration. It was the epitome, the height, of narcissism—and I felt a surge of wild passion—intensified—I'd never quite felt like this before. It was as if my senses were attuned to the pulse of nature—to the life beat of eternity.

A popper slammed into my nose—a joint into my mouth—the grass and amyl nitrate combining in my throat with the electricity—combusting the super-energy into my body—the pure animal of my being bursting forth—my veins pulsing—my heart tripping—hammering into ecstasy—the vibrant natural joy of the animal. Yes—I was Superman—Superstud!

Yes, Superstud center stage—every eye riveted on George B. Misa—I was it—I was the king of the mountain—the show, a supershow they'd not forget for the rest of their natural lives. Why not let them salivate over a real weightlifter's body? My Levis were already down to my ankles. Quickly I kicked off my shoes and got out of my pants. I stood motionless for a moment, letting them feast on my thick, muscular legs, and then I ripped off my T-shirt. There was a group gasp of admiration. I stood naked except for my socks in front of my panting audience.

Suddenly I realized that everyone in the john could not get a clear view of me, so I jumped up on the trough-like urinal above my audience. I still had some piss, so I let go with it. I watched it arc in the air—catching the light from the 200-watt bulb on the wall—a sudden, mind-boggling rainbow—yes, a rainbow of piss—golden now with pale sparkling yellows and tinges of orange—somehow the rainbow filled the room with color—translucent and shiny. I was in another space—a space of vibrant color and beauty.

I smiled at the two studs who were playing in the colorful shower of hot piss—they giggled as the urine sprayed against their faces, their bodies. I stared at their heaving chests and the rapid pulse beat in their necks, their upturned faces—a couple of innocent choirboys.

Now all the eyes in the crapper were focused on me in a frenzy of hero worship. They tore at their flies, pulling out their dicks and jerking off wildly—all of them grooving on my body. I got another shot of amyl stuck up my nose as I spurted out my last trickle of piss into a thirsty mouth, and suddenly the rainbow was gone. I felt sad for a moment.

Then I heard the dude in the corner. He looked like a truck driver with his heavy beard and thick body. “Fuckin’ great-lookin’ stud—motherfucker!” His spunk spurted in thick jets from his stubby dick. An old man fell to his knees just in time to catch a glob of hot jizz on his face. The rest of it fell to the filthy floor.

I knew I hadn’t shown my audience anything yet. I braced my feet on the trough-shaped urinal, getting them in the right position to really show off my body. Twisting my torso sideways, I did my biceps pose, letting them have it straight on—right between the eyes. It took a quick moment for the pose to slam into their consciousness. Then there was a concerted gasp of awe, of adoration—followed by a pinpoint vibration of raw passion. The appreciative feedback from my audience turned me on even more, and my dick got even harder, waving above their faces. They looked like a pack of starving dogs, salivating for my meat. Now I took out all the stops, slam-bam into their innermost consciousness with my raw sex—ordering them to their knees with my vibrations—sending the subliminal message: “Worship me”—yeah, the message loud and clear—“You belong to me—you are the only one here alone with me—no one else exists but the two of us—I love you for this moment—get down on your knees and suck my dick! Eat out my asshole! Take my eight inches up your ass! You are my slave!”

I continued to slam them with my subliminal message, and their souls melted before my eyes. Yeah, in that wild moment, I psychologically grabbed each one of them by the ears and fucked them in the face—and shot my jets of Adonis-cum down their throats. I had turned the seedy john into a room satiated with sex ecstasy—wonderful, wild. Suddenly, I knew it was all a mind trip, an inner voyage—a trip that had no boundaries, a place of discovery.

And now I knew why. Hell, this was just a preview of the Mr. Bay Area Contest, right here in this filthy john on the Embarcadero. Didn’t everyone have the same feelings? Weren’t all feelings universal, somehow mystical—maybe coming from the cosmos? Didn’t everyone want a knight in shining armor with a big lance to slay the dragon? A god—someone they could unashamedly adore, someone who was worthy to stand firmly on the motherfuckin’ pedestal? Yeah! I was it! I was the greatest! Wow!

My voice was low, resonant. "Yes, my slaves, you may kiss my feet!" My words bounced off the slimy walls. I closed my eyes for a moment, enjoying the multitude of tongues, on my instep, my heels—tongues and more tongues slipping and sliding on my young flesh, slobbering their way upwards, hungrily licking their way up my calves to my rock-hard thighs, one bold tongue forging ahead, searching for and finding the hairy crack of my asshole, and . . .

"Fuck off!" I yelled, still with my eyes closed. The tongues stopped licking at my command. Then there was a unanimous groan and a sigh as they waited—waited for the next command from their master, their god. I gave them one last pose. Elbow bent, wrist against my hips, and the sudden out-thrust of my massive chest, defining my pectoral muscles and bulging the "V" of my lats—accenting the crisscross sinews of my iron stomach. Finally the awed hush was broken by a cadence of passionate breathing—it got faster and faster as I held my pose.

"Beautiful, motherfucker!"

"Incredible . . ."

"I'm cumming—blagagh!"

They were shooting off like firecrackers.

I couldn't help thinking: wouldn't it be great if I could have this same audience at the Mr. Bay Area Contest—and wouldn't it be the cat's meow if they could jerk off instead of clapping their hands? And what if the verdict at the Mr. Bay Area Contest was not by a panel of judges, but was determined by how much jism was expended—or possibly by the number of orgasms over a particular contestant? Yeah, jackoffability! Wouldn't that be right down to the nitty-gritty, to the meat of the situation? And wouldn't that take the cheating out of all physique contests? And wouldn't all the crooked politics go down the tubes and be replaced by a pure animal response?

Then I saw the dirty blond in the suede pants with the beautiful smile.

What I remembered about him was his perfect, beautiful teeth. He was the guy who'd given me the aspirin when I'd been upstairs in the bar. Then it slammed into my consciousness. Of course, it hadn't been aspirin. He had given me some mind-altering drug. Maybe it was acid! After all, what was I doing naked in a filthy toilet on the Embarcadero? For a second I felt like punching out the son of a bitch. But then I realized that I was having myself a ball, and I felt great—as if I was plugged into some universal electric dynamo.

Then the dirty blond in the tight suede pants did something very strange, and I wasn't sure if it was a hallucination or not. One second he was smiling at me with his perfect teeth. Then his hand reached up to his mouth, and suddenly the smile was gone from his face. The lips sagged inward. Then I looked down at his hand. The smile was in the palm of his hand. There were no two ways about it. His false teeth were grinning at me—from the palm of his hand.

He took a step forward. His head was parallel to my dick as I was still standing on the trough-shaped urinal. "Can I gum your cock, sir?" he asked.

I didn't have to answer verbally. My dick responded by getting even harder and pressing against his cheek. It was dribbling. The dirty blond didn't need any more encouragement. A second later I felt his gums biting down on my rock-hard prick. Geysers of passion filled my body. "Gum it, baby! Gum it!" I moaned.

Now the rest of my sex slaves went wild with passion. I closed my eyes, leaning back against the filthy wall of the toilet, grooving on the feel of their tongues—searching, seeking my body. Wet tongues—burning hot tongues—it was as if I was being lifted up by the tongues—two tongues probing at my wet asshole, slurping at my balls, my armpits, between my toes—I felt the wetness everywhere, in my ears, behind my legs—it seemed that I was living in a country of tongues and one furnace mouth without any teeth, only gums, that was propelling my dick to the wildest orgasm of my life—gumming it, gumming my dick—cum, cum, cum!—geysers, an ocean of jism—now, starting under my toenails, they disintegrated into nothingness—my body now turned into a cascading sea of passion, roaring madcap waves screaming the joy of life—pounding, pounding—the gums gumming, gumming—shit!—and now it was a thousand tongues, a million tongues, a universe of tongues, all of them pleasuring my body—and my dick, now a redwood tree, the hot sap oozing from deep inside—oozing, and then an earthquake tearing and ripping at the foundations of my body—and then the grand eruption, the earthquake, all of it jumbled up in my head, sap and lava and—spewing forth, the lava of my soul erupting from my dick, scalding out of its enormous cockhead—spewing hotly, thickly, into the toothless mouth of the dirty blond in the tight suede pants, zinging my spunk down his throat, the electricity of my body filling him—zing! splat! zing! zing!—and I looked down. Christ, it looked like I could crawl down the hole in his face, the cavern, the enormous toothless mouth . . .

THE KEWPIE-DOLL KISS

A Screenplay

FADE IN:

EXTERIOR—1018 MAIN STREET, WATSONVILLE, CALIFORNIA / BACK YARD—
DAY—1931.

(Blond GEORGIE, age 7, is dressed as if ready for church. He plays catch with a silver ball made out of the tinfoil scraps from cigarette packets.)

GEORGIE: (Talking to his silver ball.) Jefferson, I ain't gonna drop you.

(When he hears laughter from the barn, he puts "Jefferson" in his pocket and sneaks into the barn.)

INTERIOR—BARN—DAY.

(GEORGIE's older brothers, LOUIE, 11, and JACKIE, 10, both dark, dump grapes into a huge vat. They wear dirty overalls and are barefoot. GEORGIE's father, CHARLIE, 35, is naked. He stomps on the grapes. He is dark with a head of thick, jet-black hair.)

GEORGIE: Daddy, kin I—

CHARLIE: Ain't yer daddy!

GEORGIE: Huh?

CHARLIE: Yer mom—she screws everything in pants. Get the hell outta here, you little twerp.

(GEORGIE quickly leaves the barn.)

GEORGIE: (Talking to "Jefferson.") Why—why don' Daddy—why's he always pickin' on me? I bet it's because I ain't dumb like Louie—Louie the blockhead—always braggin' 'bout—yeah—Daddy wins all his fistfights with a haymaker in the first round.

INTERIOR—BEDROOM—DAY.

(GEORGIE's mother, ANNA, 28, is putting on her make-up as GEORGIE watches her adoringly. GEORGIE's sister, VIOLET, 12, is dark and has a Dutch-boy haircut. She is cutting out a picture of Jean Harlow from a movie magazine. ANNA speaks with a light Croatian accent.)

ANNA: When your no-good father asked for my hand in marriage, he told my daddy he had discovered a gold mine in Nevada. I was a virgin. Why do you think I—

VIOLET: "— married him in the first place."

ANNA: What—what are you saying?

VIOLET: (Frazzled.) You drive me loony, Mama!

ANNA: I don't want you to use—

VIOLET: How many times you gonna tell me the same story over and over?

ANNA: You have the same mean eyes—just like your father.

(VIOLET sighs in despair as she pastes the photo of Jean Harlow in her scrapbook. GEORGIE looks at the photo of Jean Harlow.)

GEORGIE: She ain't as purty as Mama!

VIOLET: Of course, she's purtier—she's a movie star.

ANNA: She's a vamp, and she dyes her hair. (Puts on a tight-fitting red dress.) Violet, the waist—should I take it in?

VIOLET: It's hunky-dory, Mama.

ANNA: Hunky-dory? Hunky-dory? What kind of a word is that?

VIOLET: It's slang, Mama.

ANNA: Refined people do not use slang words.

(CHARLIE enters, wearing overalls but no shirt. His bare feet are stained with grape juice.)

CHARLIE: Anna, tomorrow I'm gonna drive over to Castroville. See if I kin pick up work haulin' artichokes to San Jose.

(ANNA is looking in the mirror as she applies lipstick.)

ANNA: Why don't you just go back to work for Uncle Mateo?

CHARLIE: How—how many times do I hafta tell you? I don' wanna hear his name in my house.

ANNA: (Down her nose.) Uncle Mateo is the only one who will give you work.

CHARLIE: He fired me, for chrissakes.

ANNA: He fired you because you were drunk on the job. (CHARLIE strikes kitchen match on his butt. He lights a Lucky Strike cigarette.) Charlie, get down on your knees and beg him for forgiveness.

CHARLIE: (Very angry.) Are you crazy? I would—

ANNA: Uncle Mateo is old. He is ready for the grave. If you get on the good side of him, he will leave you plenty of money in his will. We will be on easy street.

CHARLIE: He's a miser, Anna. He's leavin' all his moolah to his whorin' sons.

ANNA: How do you know? Did you see his will?

CHARLIE: I don' want any of his blood money. He got it all from the backs of poor people.

ANNA: Charlie, when are you—

CHARLIE: Lenin had the right idea when he ordered Tsar Nicholas shot by a firing squad. Better yet—fry Uncle Mateo in the electric chair.

ANNA: Holy Mary—you say you don't want money from him, but you let him put the down payment on this house.

CHARLIE: He sits on his fat ass while the moolah rolls in.

ANNA: He slaved for many, many years as a dishwasher. He—

CHARLIE: No work—no nothin'. College graduates are ridin' the rails. What we need is a revolution. Just like the one in Russia!

ANNA: Holy Mary, Mother of God. I married a Bolshevik!

CHARLIE: Yeah, and I'm proud of it.

ANNA: You will burn in hell for all eternity.

CHARLIE: Ain't no such place! (ANNA puts on her pillbox hat and pulls the netted veil over her eyes.) So where you off to this time?

ANNA: For me to know and for you to find out.

CHARLIE: It's the old buzzard.

ANNA: The old—? Are you talking about Professor Henry Bossert?

CHARLIE: He ain't no professor.

ANNA: He is a genius. He studied under Victor Herbert, who is famous for his operettas.

CHARLIE: He ain't gonna marry a gal with four kids.

ANNA: I'm already married—to a bootlegger.

CHARLIE: (Suddenly contrite.) Anna, I wancha to know—

ANNA: What?

CHARLIE: I jus' finished the last batch. Ain't gonna make no more wine.

ANNA: You said that last year.

CHARLIE: I mean it, Anna. I—

ANNA: Charlie Birimisa, you always make promises that you can't keep.

CHARLIE: You don' fool me. You're gonna stay hitched to me till you can trap some sap with lots of do-re-mi, like the old buzzard.

ANNA: (Turning away.) I refuse to argue with you.

CHARLIE: Where did you get the red dress?

ANNA: I made it on my Singer.

CHARLIE: Baloney. You screwed the old buzzard for it.

ANNA: (Shocked.) Holy Mary—in front of the children.

CHARLIE: Anna, I'm the—first it was the chiropractor guy—then the milkman, and now it's the old buzzard. They—I'm the laughingstock everywhere I go. I—

ANNA: It is nothing but gossip. I take Violet to Professor Bossert for violin lessons. That is all.

CHARLIE: You spent all day at his house yesterday.

ANNA: The Professor wants Violet to practice for three hours every day. He says if she does, she—

CHARLIE: Anna, where do you get the moolah to pay the old fart?

ANNA: He teaches Violet for free because he says she can become a great violinist like Fritz Kreisler.

CHARLIE: You don' fool me—he's fuckin' you!

(ANNA puts her hands over her ears.)

ANNA: Holy Mary, Mother of God! What good are you? You are not a good provider. You—

CHARLIE: Here! I got some moolah!

(CHARLIE waves a roll of bills over his head. He slams a ten-dollar bill on ANNA's vanity.)

ANNA: I don't want your bootleg money.

CHARLIE: Why you—you—!

(CHARLIE makes a grab for ANNA. He rips off her red dress.)

GEORGIE: Don' you hurt my mama!

(GEORGIE throws "Jefferson" at Charlie—it hits him in the head. CHARLIE roars with laughter.)

CHARLIE: You fuckin' tutti-frutti brat!

(CHARLIE grabs GEORGIE. ANNA makes a beeline for the door. She's in her petticoat and her pillbox hat.)

EXTERIOR—FRONT YARD / EMPTY LOT—DAY.

ANNA: Help! Help! Police! My husband—he is trying to kill me!

(ANNA hides behind the Morton Salt billboard, which reads: “WHEN IT RAINS IT POURS.” CHARLIE rushes out of the house with GEORGIE over his head. He throws him in the general direction of the billboard.)

CHARLIE: Take your little sweetheart with you, you fuckin’ cunt!

(CHARLIE gets into his flatbed truck and speeds away. VIOLET sticks her head out of the living-room window.)

VIOLET: (Waves the ten-spot.) Mama! I got the moolah!

(ANNA appears from behind the billboard. Behind her, we see a broken-down car in the empty lot. ANNA races into the house followed by GEORGIE, who grabs “Jefferson.”)

GEORGIE: (Talking to “Jefferson.”) Gee! Jefferson, you okey-dokey?

(GEORGIE puts “Jefferson” in his pocket.)

INTERIOR—LIVING ROOM—DAY.

ANNA: (Picks up the phone.) Operator? 922! Oh, Mr. Anzio, if I were not married, I would—what? A jar of peanut butter and a loaf of sourdough. Charge it to my husband. Thank you, kind sir.

VIOLET: Mama, where are we runnin’ away to this time?

ANNA: Hurry—hurry to the store. If your drunken father gets back before we leave, he will kill us.

VIOLET: Mama, let’s go to Hollywood this time. I wanna get Jean Harlow’s autograph.

ANNA: Go to the grocery.

(The screen door bangs shut behind VIOLET.)

GEORGIE: Uh—am I gonna go too, Mama?

(ANNA dips a washrag into a basin of water.)

ANNA: I would never leave my little angel with your no-good father. (She quickly undresses GEORGIE. She washes his underarms, his butt, and vigorously scrubs his penis.) Darling, we are going to beautiful San Francisco. We will also go to the de Young Museum, where you will see the paintings of Renoir and Monet. (Kisses GEORGIE’s forehead.) You are not like your ruffian brothers. Darling, your mother loves you with all her heart and soul.

GEORGIE: Mama? You know, uh—when I grow up, I’m gonna buy you *A Dress Made of Diamonds*.

ANNA: Darling, when you grow up, you’re going to be a great symphony conductor like the Professor, or a genius toe-dancer like Nijinsky.

(ANNA kisses GEORGIE on his stomach and his penis.)

EXTERIOR—SAN FRANCISCO / HEADLANDS—DAY.

(A shot of San Francisco from the Marin Headlands before the Golden Gate Bridge was built.)

INTERIOR—HOTEL LOBBY—DAY.

(ANNA, VIOLET, and GEORGIE enter the seedy lobby of a hotel in the Tenderloin. VIOLET carries a battered suitcase and her violin case. ANNA is wearing a tight pink dress. GEORGIE picks up an empty pack of Old Golds from the lobby floor.)

ANNA: Hello! I don’t know if I should say this, but—

ROOM CLERK: Yes, Madam?

ANNA: For a moment I thought you were Ramon Navarro, the movie star.

ROOM CLERK: Hardly, ma'am.

ANNA: How much for a room?

ROOM CLERK: For you and the children? Four-fifty a night.

ANNA: Oh, heavens! Do you have anything, uh—less dear?

VIOLET: (Upset.) Oh, Mama! Quit tryin' to jew him down.

ANNA: Only speak when you're spoken to.

(ANNA places four one-dollar bills on the counter.)

ROOM CLERK: You're short four bits. (ANNA places pennies on the counter. The ROOM CLERK counts them.) Twelve cents, please.

ANNA: I think I have—

(ANNA digs into her change purse.)

VIOLET: (Upset.) Oh, Mama!

ROOM CLERK: I'll make up the difference.

(ANNA giggles and squeezes his hand.)

ANNA: You are a real gentleman.

(VIOLET rolls her eyes.)

INTERIOR—HOTEL ROOM—DAY.

(A narrow room. A pink print of Jesus with a crimson heart. Peeling wallpaper. VIOLET sits on the sagging bed.)

VIOLET: I hope it ain't got cooties.

ANNA: Doesn't have cooties.

VIOLET: (Holding her nose.) Stinks in here. (ANNA puts a linen tablecloth on the chest of drawers. She takes a jar of peanut butter from her purse.) You know I hate peanut butter.

ANNA: Then you will starve to death.

VIOLET: Oh, Mother!

ANNA: It's time for you to practice.

VIOLET: Where?

ANNA: Go to the bathroom.

VIOLET: What bathroom?

ANNA: (Looks.) Oh, my God!

VIOLET: (Smiling.) Down the hall, Mama! You didn't smell it?

GEORGIE: I gotta do number two!

(ANNA opens violin case. She hands the violin to VIOLET.)

ANNA: Three hours like the Professor says.

INTERIOR—HOTEL BATHROOM—DAY.

(We hear VIOLET playing the scales. ANNA cleans seat with toilet paper. Then she puts toilet paper on the seat. She pulls down GEORGIE's short pants, and he sits on toilet.)

ANNA: I'll be right back, sweetheart.

(ANNA exits. GEORGIE does his duty. Then he takes the tin foil from the empty pack of Old Golds and wraps it around "Jefferson." He gets off the toilet seat—his bare ass is showing—he stands in the doorway of the bathroom. He talks to "Jefferson.")

GEORGIE: Heck, Jefferson! I kin wipe myself, but Mama—she always wants to do it for me. (Shouting.) Mama, I'm done. (No answer. He moves into the hallway with his pants down. Screams.) Where are you, Mama?

ANNA: (Voice-over.) Your mother is coming, sweetheart.

(ANNA enters. She looks in toilet bowl.)

ANNA: Two big ones! You are my sweet angel.

(ANNA wipes his butt.)

EXTERIOR—SAN FRANCISCO—NIGHT.

(Art deco movie palace.)

INTERIOR—THEATER—NIGHT.

(Thirty people in the cavernous theater. A dwarf is playing "Lazybones" on the accordion. A smattering of applause. The M.C. rushes onstage.)

M.C.: Top prize is ten dollars. Second prize—a set of dishes. Third prize is a ticket to see Mae West in *Night After Night* and *She Done Him Wrong*. And now—Miss Violet and her baby brother.

(VIOLET holds her violin in one hand. GEORGIE is dressed in short pants and a red velvet shirt. VIOLET plays "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling" on her violin. GEORGIE tries to sing but nothing comes out of his mouth. VIOLET stops.)

GEORGIE: (Finally sings.) "When, uh—Irish eyes are, uh—smilin', sure it's like a moanin' spring. In the filth of—"

(GEORGIE freezes. Then VIOLET sings.)

VIOLET, GEORGIE: "In the lilt of Irish laughter you can hear the angels sing. When Irish eyes are happy—"

(GEORGIE bolts offstage. VIOLET stops playing. Then she runs offstage. GEORGIE is clinging to ANNA in the wings. The M.C. is nearby, looking on in disgust.)

ANNA: Violet Birimisa, what is the matter with you?

VIOLET: I was ascared to death, Mama.

ANNA: We can still win a prize.

M.C.: Yeah, the booby prize.

ANNA: What is the booby prize?

INTERIOR—ARTIST'S STUDIO—DAY.

(ANNA and GEORGIE enter a Tenderloin studio. GEORGIE carries his dog-eared "Oz" book. Unframed paintings of naked women on zebra rugs. MR. FRATZI is in a bathrobe.)

ANNA: Sweetheart, Mr. Fratzi is a great artist. He is going to paint your mother for posterity.

GEORGIE: Uh—what's pos, uh—?

ANNA: Pos-ter-ity!

GEORGIE: P-O-S-T-E-R-I-T-Y.

ANNA: (Holding out her hand.) Pay me the four dollars.

MR. FRATZI: I usually—but of course.

(MR. FRATZI hands ANNA four dollar bills.)

ANNA: Sweetheart, turn around and face the wall.

(GEORGIE faces the wall but he peeks—he watches as his mother takes off her clothes.)

MR. FRATZI: Lovely! Lovely! Your skin—it's like a delicate shade of ivory—it—

(MR. FRATZI touches ANNA's shoulder. His hand moves toward her naked breast.)

GEORGIE: (Whirls around.) Mama? What are you—?

(ANNA giggles as she puts her hands over her breasts.)

ANNA: But, darling, the nice man is not going to hurt your mother. Turn around, dear.

(GEORGIE faces the wall. He sticks out his tongue at a painting of Joan Crawford.

As MR. FRATZI paints ANNA, we see his hand under his robe. He is touching himself.)

INTERIOR—HOTEL ROOM—DAY.

(VIOLET is sitting on the bed, practicing the scales as ANNA and GEORGIE enter.)

ANNA: Did you practice for three hours?

(VIOLET points her violin bow at the bureau.)

VIOLET: A letter from him.

ANNA: Him? Him? Who is him?

VIOLET: The Professor, who else?

(ANNA opens the letter. A five-dollar bill falls to the floor. ANNA picks up the bill and puts it in her bra.)

ANNA: (Reads.) "Go look for a furnished apartment near Golden Gate Park with two bedrooms. I will drive up on Saturday." (She claps her hands.) Thank the good Lord. We will not end up as paupers.

GEORGIE: Uh—P-A-U-P-E-R-S?

ANNA: That is correct. Darling, you are so—so smart.

VIOLET: It's 'bout time we got out of this ump-day.

ANNA: Ump-day? Ump-day? What kind of a word is that?

VIOLET: Pig Latin. Everybody is—

ANNA: I don't want to hear. We are going to the symphony. Issay Dobrowen is conducting Tchaikovsky's Symphony Number Five. The balcony is cheap.

EXTERIOR—THE FURNISHED APARTMENT—VERANDAH—DAY—1932.

(GEORGIE is wrapping tin foil from a pack of Chesterfield cigarettes around "Jefferson." VIOLET enters.)

VIOLET: Let's play hopscotch.

GEORGIE: Only if, uh—you tell me the secret.

VIOLET: What secret?

GEORGIE: When I'm aroun' you and Mom, uh—you clam up.

VIOLET: It's just—just because.

GEORGIE: Because why?

VIOLET: Just because.

(VIOLET picks at a scab on her kneecap.)

GEORGIE: I ain't gonna—I won't spill the beans, Sis.

VIOLET: You always spill the beans to Mama.

GEORGIE: Cross my heart and hope to die.

VIOLET: Nope.

GEORGIE: Uh—purty please?

VIOLET: Well I shouldn't, but—Mom's gonna have a new baby.

GEORGIE: She's havin' a new baby?

VIOLET: That's what I said.

GEORGIE: Where, uh—where is it—?

VIOLET: (Laughing.) You still believe in the stork.

GEORGIE: Heck no, I don'.

VIOLET: You do, too.

GEORGIE: Do not.

VIOLET: It's in her belly, Georgie.

GEORGIE: Uh—how did it get there?

VIOLET: Daddy put it there.

GEORGIE: How did he do that?

VIOLET: For me to know and for you to find out.

INTERIOR—THE FURNISHED APARTMENT—KITCHEN—DAY.

(A large kitchen—wood-burning stove. VIOLET is pasting a photo of Clara Bow in her photo album. ANNA empties the pan under the icebox.)

ANNA: Did you change your mind?

VIOLET: 'Bout what?

ANNA: Your no-good dad, who else?

VIOLET: Do you really hafta divorce Daddy?

ANNA: Young lady—you are going to testify!

VIOLET: But Mom—Daddy—he didn't do nothin' to me—down below.

(ANNA grabs VIOLET and shakes her.)

ANNA: Do you want to go back to the fleas—back to the—?

VIOLET: But I love Daddy. He—

ANNA: Don't you see? I need the divorce quick. I must strike while the iron is hot. The Professor will not marry me when my stomach—when it gets big.

VIOLET: (Tortured.) Gee! Mama! Daddy will be in the courtroom and everything, I—

ANNA: Well-to-do men like the Professor don't grow on trees. (She bangs tablet on kitchen table.) Just learn this by heart and tell it to the judge.

VIOLET: Oh, Mama!

ANNA: Do you hear your mother?

VIOLET: How could I not hear you?

(VIOLET grabs the tablet and runs out of the room.)

INTERIOR—THE FURNISHED APARTMENT—PARLOR—DAY.

(VIOLET is practicing the violin. GEORGIE runs over to VIOLET. He shows her "Jefferson.")

GEORGIE: Sis, as soon as I make Jefferson's head as big as mine is, I'm gonna give him eyes so he can see.

VIOLET: Can't you see I'm practicin'?

GEORGIE: No you ain't. You're talkin' to me.

(VIOLET hits GEORGIE with her bow. He knocks over the music stand. Sheet music scatters all over the floor. ANNA enters.)

ANNA: Holy Mary, Mother of God! (She is on her knees, picking up the sheet music.) The Professor—he gives you a Stradivarius and this is the thanks he gets?

VIOLET: It ain't a Stradivarius.

ANNA: Don't talk back!

(VIOLET bursts into tears.)

VIOLET: I—I—oh—I'm going to hell because I lied about Daddy.

ANNA: What? What are you saying?

VIOLET: Daddy smiled at me. He wasn't even mad at me.

ANNA: Violet, you have a half-hour more to practice. Remember—practice makes perfect!

(ANNA exits. VIOLET sniffs and wipes the tears from her eyes. The PROFESSOR enters the front door. He is carrying a suitcase. He listens as VIOLET finishes the scales.)

VIOLET: (With forced smile.) I just finished practicing for three hours.

PROFESSOR: You are a good little girl. (He shouts.) Anna, I am home.

(ANNA enters. She rushes over to the PROFESSOR and kisses him on the cheek.)

ANNA: I have weenies—weenies and sauerkraut.

(ANNA exits. VIOLET quickly puts her violin in the case and snaps it shut.)

VIOLET: I'll go and get you your slippers.

PROFESSOR: Are you off to catch the trolley?

VIOLET: The trolley?

PROFESSOR: I was making a joke. I would like a hug.

(VIOLET hesitates—then she gives him a quick kiss on the cheek. The PROFESSOR grabs VIOLET—he hugs and kisses her. His face is flushed and saliva drips from his mouth. ANNA enters.)

ANNA: (Stern.) Violet, go wash your hands and set the table. (VIOLET quickly exits. The PROFESSOR picks up an empty pack of cigarettes from the couch. Holds it up and looks accusingly at ANNA.) Oh, yes. It belongs to Georgie. He—

PROFESSOR: He smokes Lucky Strike cigarettes?

ANNA: He picks up empty packs from the street, and he—

PROFESSOR: What kind of cigarettes does your hoodlum of a husband smoke?

ANNA: He is no longer my husband.

PROFESSOR: You lived with him for thirteen years and you have no idea of what brand of cigarettes he smokes?

ANNA: Well, uh—he used to smoke Chesterfields but then he changed to—I can't remember.

(The PROFESSOR smiles at GEORGIE, showing large yellow teeth.)

PROFESSOR: I understand your father smokes Lucky Strike cigarettes. (GEORGIE looks at ANNA.) Don't look at your mother.

GEORGIE: Uh—uh—yes, uh—he smokes Lucky Strikes, sir.

(The PROFESSOR looks at ANNA.)

PROFESSOR: I was going to marry you. (Disgusted.) Look at you—your stomach—it is swelling with his offspring!

ANNA: Holy Mary, Mother of God—yours—it is yours. The last time I saw Charlie was at the divorce.

PROFESSOR: George, when was the last time Charlie was in this house?

GEORGE: Huh?

PROFESSOR: You heard me, boy!

GEORGIE: He, uh—he ain't never bin here, sir.

PROFESSOR: If he's never been here, how did the Lucky Strikes get on the divan?

GEORGIE: I pick up the empty packs from the street and I peel off the silver foil an' wrap it around Jefferson.

PROFESSOR: What are you talking about?

(GEORGIE holds up “Jefferson.”)

GEORGIE: This is Jefferson, sir.

PROFESSOR: That is—? (Shakes his head.) Tell me about the gentleman who visits your mother.

GEORGIE: Gee! Only one who comes here is the milkman, sir.

PROFESSOR: He enters the house?

GEORGIE: He brings a bottle of milk.

PROFESSOR: He comes into this house?

GEORGIE: He puts the bottle of milk on the porch.

(The PROFESSOR throws the empty pack of cigarettes in the wastebasket. He sits down and lights his pipe.)

PROFESSOR: Anna, do you recall the gray stucco that was for rent in Hollister?

ANNA: The one on Hawkins Street with the walnut tree?

PROFESSOR: The Jew who owns it—what is his—?

ANNA: Rosenberg.

PROFESSOR: He asked for thirty-five a month, but I jewed him down to twenty-five dollars.

ANNA: You—you got the job at Hollister High?

PROFESSOR: Music teacher and bandmaster.

(ANNA claps her hands.)

ANNA: I am so—so happy!

PROFESSOR: We will get the wedding business over quickly. Then we will depart six A.M. Friday for three days in Yosemite.

ANNA: Yosemite! Oh, I’ve—

PROFESSOR: Just the three of us.

ANNA: The three of us?

PROFESSOR: That is correct.

ANNA: Oh, Mrs. Cadd next door. She is willing to take care of Violet while we are on our honeymoon. I—

PROFESSOR: Honeymoon? Anna, you are a woman with four children and a fifth one on the way. You expect—? (He frowns.) The oboe—I am going to start Violet on the oboe as soon as we get to Yosemite.

ANNA: (Disappointed.) Yes—yes, Daddy.

(The PROFESSOR hands ANNA an envelope.)

PROFESSOR: Take care of the business with Charlie’s brat right away.

(The PROFESSOR grabs his valise and exits. GEORGIE takes the empty pack of Lucky Strikes out of the wastebasket.)

EXTERIOR—VERANDAH—DAY.

(GEORGIE throws “Jefferson” in the air and tries to catch it behind his back. He misses it. He quickly picks it up.)

GEORGIE: Gee, Jefferson, I didn’t—

(ANNA enters. She sits in swing on verandah. She pulls GEORGIE on her lap.)

ANNA: Oh, my darling, you are so heavy I can barely lift you. You are going to be six feet tall. Oh, Georgie, tell me how much you love me. (GEORGIE holds his hands a foot apart.) That is all? (GEORGIE holds his hands as wide as they will go. ANNA

squeezes him and kisses the back of his neck.) Do you love your mother enough to do something that will make her very, very happy?

GEORGIE: Uh-huh.

ANNA: Once the Professor marries me, we will be rich. But—but the Professor—he will only marry me if you do what your mother tells you to do.

GEORGIE: Whacha wan' me to do, Mama?

ANNA: I want you to live with your father until right after I have the baby.

GEORGIE: (Puzzled.) You wan' me, uh—?

ANNA: Darling, I will come and get you as soon as I have the baby.

GEORGIE: Uh—tomorrow?

ANNA: Very, very soon, dear.

GEORGIE: Uh—is Violet comin' to Watsonville with me?

ANNA: You will be with Louie and Jackie.

GEORGIE: (Fearful.) Violet—she—she ain't goin' with me?

ANNA: Honey, it will only be for a little—

(GEORGIE rushes into the house.)

INTERIOR—BATHROOM—DAY.

(GEORGIE is seated on the toilet. ANNA enters and makes a grab for him. He jumps into the bathtub.)

GEORGIE: (Screaming.) I hate the Perfesser!

ANNA: Holy Mary, Mother of God. He will hear you, and—

GEORGIE: I hate him!

(GEORGIE sobs hysterically. ANNA picks him up, sits on the toilet seat and rocks him back and forth.)

ANNA: Sweetheart, I promise you—as soon as I have the new baby, I will come and get you. You will have plenty of Eskimo Pies and candy kisses. You—

GEORGIE: It's all because of him! He—

ANNA: Do you want your mama to be rich and happy, dear?

GEORGIE: I, uh—huh?

(The tears are rolling down GEORGIE's face as he nods his head.)

ANNA: You are my—wonderful—wonderful love child.

(ANNA plants Kewpie-doll kisses all over GEORGIE's face.)

EXTERIOR—WATSONVILLE—DAY.

(The Greyhound pulls up in front of the bus station. GEORGIE and a few passengers get off the bus. GEORGIE is wearing short pants and his red velvet shirt, and is carrying a cardboard suitcase.)

INTERIOR—BUS STATION—DAY.

(GEORGIE rushes into the men's room. He kneels in front of toilet—he throws up. He presses his head against the toilet bowl.)

EXTERIOR—STREET—NIGHT.

(GEORGIE finds an empty pack of Phillip Morris cigarettes in the gutter. He is removing the tin foil when CHARLIE's flatbed stops at the bus station—he honks the horn. GEORGIE quickly puts "Jefferson" in his pocket and gets into the truck. Silence as CHARLIE drives down Main Street.)

CHARLIE: Did she hook the old son of a bitch?

GEORGIE: Huh?

CHARLIE: Did she marry the old buzzard?

GEORGIE: Uh—he said he was gonna.

CHARLIE: She in the family way?

GEORGIE: Uh-huh.

CHARLIE: I knock her up and the old fart thinks it's his papoose. (CHARLIE stops in front of the bungalow at 1018 Main Street.) Vamoose, boy!

(GEORGIE gets out of the truck with his cardboard suitcase. The truck leaves. Pitch darkness. Strange night sounds. The bang of a screen door. JACKIE stands on the porch with a kerosene lamp. He wears filthy overalls—he is barefoot.)

JACKIE: What's cookin', Georgie?

GEORGIE: Gee! Uh—nothin' I can think of.

INTERIOR—KITCHEN—NIGHT.

(JACKIE leads GEORGIE into the kitchen. He puts the kerosene lamp on the table. LOUIE enters.)

LOUIE: Jiggers!

(LOUIE grabs GEORGIE's hand. JACKIE blows out the lamp. They rush into the bedroom.)

INTERIOR—CLOSET—NIGHT.

(LOUIE straddles the empty clothes bar—he pushes a loose board in the ceiling and disappears into the attic. JACKIE falls to his knees.)

JACKIE: Get on my back!

(GEORGIE climbs on JACKIE's shoulders. LOUIE pulls GEORGIE into the attic.)

INTERIOR—ATTIC—NIGHT.

(JACKIE climbs into the attic and replaces the floorboard. There is the sound of heavy footsteps. LOUIE puts his index finger over his lips.)

TRUANT OFFICER: (Voice-over.) When I catch those little motherfuckers, I'm gonna—where in hell—?

(There is the sound of fading footsteps. The bang of the front door slamming.)

LOUIE: (Whispers.) I betcha he's tryin' to outfox us. I'm gonna see if he's sneakin' aroun'.

(LOUIE disappears through the hole in the attic floor.)

INTERIOR—KITCHEN—NIGHT.

(JACKIE and GEORGIE are waiting. LOUIE comes running into the kitchen.)

LOUIE: Ain't seen hide nor hair of 'im. (To GEORGIE.) This is my stealin' jacket. See what I got? (Pulls out a can of beans.)

JACKIE: It's got pockets that go all the way 'round in the back so we kin hide stuff.

(LOUIE opens the can of beans with a can opener. He shoves his fingers into the can and scoops beans into his mouth. He pushes the can of beans toward GEORGIE, who eats the beans with his fingers.)

JACKIE: Let's go and get Georgie drunk.

LOUIE: Only half a barrel of wine left. Gotta keep it for Daddy. Gotta keep his blood red.

JACKIE: Let's go sneak into the Pajaro—Richard Dix in this submarine, an' this giant octopus—

LOUIE: If we don' hit the hay afore Daddy gets home, he's gonna beat the livin' daylights out of us.

JACKIE: Heck, Louie—he ain't bin home since—gosh—three days.

LOUIE: Anyways, it's jus' because.

JACKIE: Because why?

LOUIE: Because he's getting' the do-re-mi so we kin git to Nevada and discover a gold mine.

INTERIOR—BEDROOM—NIGHT.

(The THREE BOYS take off their clothes and get in bed, with GEORGIE in the middle. LOUIE pulls the dirty gray sheet up to his chin. Then LOUIE farts and sticks his head under the sheet.)

JACKIE: Whewie! Almost as loud as Daddy's!

LOUIE: Stinks to high heaven down here.

JACKIE: Louie is uts-nay! (LOUIE's answer is a loud snore.) Gotta git me a gas mask for Louie's fartin'.

(JACKIE turns off the kerosene lamp.)

INTERIOR—BEDROOM—NIGHT.

(LOUIE and JACKIE are sound asleep. GEORGIE is turning and twisting. Suddenly, GEORGIE jumps out of bed.)

GEORGIE: Holy Moly!

(GEORGIE feels his wet underwear.)

JACKIE: Louie wets the bed all the time. But don' say nothin' to him—he'll knock your block off.

(GEORGIE takes off his soaking-wet underwear.)

GEORGIE: Gonna go wash.

JACKIE: Ain't got no water. It got turned off.

EXTERIOR—STREET—MORNING.

(The THREE BOYS are in front of Fosker's bakery.)

JACKIE: Grab a loaf of bread and hightail it outta there.

GEORGIE: Gee, uh—I—

JACKIE: Nothin' to it—like fallin' off a log.

(GEORGIE hesitates, but then he pushes at the door. The ear-splitting clang of a bell.)

INTERIOR—BAKERY—MORNING.

(GEORGIE rushes to the counter. MRS. FOSKER is coming down the stairs. She is fat and tall. GEORGIE grabs a loaf of French bread and heads for the door. He turns the doorknob but it doesn't open. He puts the loaf of bread between his legs and uses both hands, but the door won't open. MRS. FOSKER is getting closer and closer. When she makes a grab for him, the door swings open.)

EXTERIOR—STREET—MORNING.

(GEORGIE holds up the loaf of bread as if he's scored a touchdown. LOUIE grabs the bread and stuffs it in his overalls. The THREE BOYS race down the street until they come to a Lucky Strike billboard. LOUIE rips off a hunk of bread—stuffs it in his mouth. He throws the bread at JACKIE, who tears off a hunk and throws it to GEORGIE. The bread slips through GEORGIE's hands and falls in a mud puddle.)

JACKIE: Butterfingers! (LOUIE picks up the bread—wipes off the mud with the sleeve of his shirt. He rips off a piece of bread and gives it to GEORGIE, who wolfs it down.) Hey, you see what I see?

(LOUIE jumps over a white picket fence—grabs a bottle of milk from the front porch.)

LOUIE: Think fast!

(LOUIE throws the bottle of milk at JACKIE, who catches it with one hand. The BOYS race down the street until they get home.)

EXTERIOR—BACK YARD—NIGHT.

(No moon. A dog howls. GEORGIE is sitting on the back steps. LOUIE and JACKIE rush up to him. They wear devil masks. GEORGIE screams—he jumps up and bangs into the screen door.)

LOUIE: Yellow belly!

JACKIE: (Hands a mask to GEORGIE.) Georgie, we stole one for you.

(GEORGIE puts on the mask. LOUIE and JACKIE take off their overalls. They are naked from the waist down. LOUIE pulls at GEORGIE's overalls.)

JACKIE: Gonna de-pants you.

(GEORGIE runs across the empty lot. LOUIE tackles him. He holds GEORGIE down while JACKIE takes off his pants.)

LOUIE: C'mon, Georgie. We gonna be nekkid devils. Follow the leader. (Jumps up and down.) Kiss my ass! Kiss my ass!

(JACKIE jumps up and down.)

LOUIE, JACKIE: Kiss my ass! Kiss my ass!

(After a moment GEORGIE, too, jumps up and down. He is laughing, enjoying himself.)

LOUIE, JACKIE, GEORGIE: Kiss my ass! Kiss my ass! Kiss my ass!

(LOUIE dashes down the street with his BROTHERS right behind him. They run past a LITTLE BOY in short pants.)

LOUIE, JACKIE, GEORGIE: (Yelling.) Kiss my ass! Kiss my ass! Kiss my ass! Kiss my ass!

(The LITTLE BOY screams and runs into his house. The THREE BOYS run around the block.)

LOUIE, JACKIE, GEORGIE: (Screaming.) Kiss my ass! Kiss my ass! Kiss my ass!

INTERIOR—KITCHEN—NIGHT.

(LOUIE pulls down his pants and squats over a paper bag. He defecates into it.)

LOUIE: Mama, she never did say nothin' 'bout not takin' a dump in the kitchen. (Grabs a box of matches.) We's gonna git even with Uncle Mateo.

EXTERIOR—EMPTY LOT / UNCLE MATEO'S HOUSE—NIGHT.

(The THREE BOYS race across the empty lot—they stop in front of Uncle Mateo's house. LOUIE tiptoes up to the porch. He sets fire to the paper bag. He rings the doorbell and quickly leaves. The porch light goes on. UNCLE MATEO opens the door. He stomps on the burning paper bag with his slippers. He puts out the fire, but there's feces on his slippers. UNCLE MATEO disappears into the house.)

LOUIE, JACKIE, GEORGIE: Kiss my ass, Uncle Mateo! Kiss my ass! Kiss my ass, Uncle Mateo!

INTERIOR—KITCHEN—DAY.

(LOUIE runs into the kitchen with a quart of milk. CHARLIE is sitting at the kitchen table. He has dark shadows under his eyes.)

LOUIE: I steal it from Mrs. Inman next door. (Hands the bottle of milk to CHARLIE.)

CHARLIE: Dr. Herkle—he tells me—he says I gotta stop drinkin’ wine—that I gotta drink this poison. (Chug-a-lugs the bottle of milk. It spills down his chin.) He says it’s my rotten teeth—the poison is gonna go to my ankles an’ kill me if I don’ git all of my teeth yanked out.

LOUIE: Yer gonna git choppers, Daddy?

CHARLIE: Ain’t got no do-re-mi. The fuckin’ bosses—they got us by the short hairs. That son of a bitch Hoover in the White House, he’s—I dunno.

LOUIE: You want me to getcha another bottle of milk?

CHARLIE: Louie, you know what the White House is?

LOUIE: A house with white paint on it.

CHARLIE: Jackie?

JACKIE: I dunno.

GEORGIE: President Hoover lives there.

(CHARLIE ignores GEORGIE.)

CHARLIE: Y’know why we call the White House “the outhouse” at the Red meetings?

LOUIE: Gee! I dunno, Daddy.

CHARLIE: That’s where all the shit is.

EXTERIOR—BACK PORCH—DAY.

(GEORGIE is inside the lead sink. He kisses “Jefferson” with a loud smacking noise. LOUIE is standing under the pear tree with a hammer in his hand. He is nailing a pair of roller skates to a two-by-four. JACKIE runs across the empty lot with an apple crate.)

LOUIE: All I needs is two one-inch-wide pieces of wood six inches long, an’ I gets me a scooter.

(ANNA appears in the back yard. She is expensively dressed, in white gloves and a veiled hat. Her fox-fur stole is draped over her shoulders. We see its beady eyes. She places a bag of groceries on the back steps.)

ANNA: Yoo-hoo! Children! Your mother is here. (LOUIE continues to work on the scooter. JACKIE ignores her. GEORGIE rushes down the back steps. ANNA’s hands keep GEORGIE from running into her arms.) Sweetheart, you are filthy dirty. When did you take a bath?

GEORGIE: Ain’t got no water, Mama.

ANNA: Where is your father?

GEORGIE: Gee! I dunno.

(LOUIE and JACKIE ignore their mother. They continue to work on the scooter.)

ANNA: Children, we will go to the ice-cream parlor for banana splits. (LOUIE races across the empty lot until he comes to the junk Chevy. He sits on the running board. ANNA holds up a silver half dollar.) I’ve got four bits for you, Louie. You, too, Jackie! (JACKIE darts across the empty lot. He sits next to LOUIE on the junk Chevy. LOUIE climbs to the top of the huge Morton Salt billboard, and JACKIE follows him.) Holy Mary, do you want to kill yourselves?

(LOUIE and JACKIE hop and skip along the top of the narrow billboard. ANNA runs into the empty lot. Her high heel gets caught in a gopher hole. She sits on the fender of the junk Chevy. GEORGIE rushes over, grabs the red shoe, and puts it on her foot. LOUIE takes a rock from his pocket and throws it at ANNA.)

ANNA: My own son—he's trying to kill me!

(ANNA grabs GEORGIE's hand and runs toward the street.)

INTERIOR—ICE-CREAM PARLOR—DAY.

(ANNA and GEORGIE are sitting in a booth. The teenage WAITRESS approaches.)

ANNA: How much for a banana split?

WAITRESS: Two bits!

ANNA: Make the scoops big. It's Georgie's birthday.

GEORGIE: (Puzzled.) Ain't my birthday, Mama.

(The WAITRESS giggles and leaves.)

ANNA: I'm going to give you fifty cents, and fifty cents each for Louie and Jackie.

GEORGIE: Huh? I, uh—how in heck can I give 'em the money?

ANNA: When you get back to the house.

GEORGIE: But—but I, uh—ain't I goin' to Hollister with you?

ANNA: Of course you are—just not today. Sweetheart, I—

GEORGIE: (Shocked.) I ain't goin' right now?

ANNA: Darling, as soon as I—

(GEORGIE jumps up—he bangs into the WAITRESS, knocking the banana split out of her hand. He runs out the door.)

EXTERIOR—PARK—DAY.

(GEORGIE hides behind a green bench. ANNA hurries across the street. Screeching brakes as a truck skids to a stop. ANNA rushes into the park—she grabs GEORGIE.)

ANNA: Oh, Georgie dear, you are the only one of all my children that I truly love.

GEORGIE: Why—why aintcha takin' me?

ANNA: It will only be a short time. Easter is almost a year old, I—

GEORGIE: Easter?

ANNA: Your baby sister. There isn't room in the house, but I convinced the Professor to make a room in the garage for you.

GEORGIE: I hate him, Mama!

ANNA: Don't talk like that. (Looks at her watch.) My God, if I miss the Greyhound, the Professor will kill me.

EXTERIOR—MAIN STREET—DAY.

(ANNA and GEORGIE race down Main Street to the Greyhound station. ANNA presses three coins into the palm of GEORGIE's hand.)

ANNA: One for you and one each for your evil brothers. You are different from them—you have brains. We will send you to the best university in California.

GEORGIE: Gee, Mama, all I want is—

ANNA: Uh—a Kewpie-doll kiss.

(ANNA kisses GEORGIE on the mouth.)

EXTERIOR—MAIN STREET—DAY.

(GEORGIE sits on the curb. He spots an empty pack of cigarettes in the gutter and shoves it in his pocket. He skips down the street in his bare feet. He looks in the window of the general store at a pair of tennis shoes.)

INTERIOR—GENERAL STORE—DAY.

GEORGIE: The tennis shoes in the window—how much?

MR. WOLFSON: A buck fifty.

(GEORGIE takes a half-dollar from his pocket.)

GEORGIE: Is this enough?

MR. WOLFSON: You're one of the Birimisa boys. (GEORGIE nods his head.) Where did you steal the money?

GEORGIE: My mama—she give it to me.

MR. WOLFSON: You got any more money? (GEORGIE takes another fifty-cent coin from his pocket.) That's all you got? (GEORGIE nods his head. MR. WOLFSON takes the money. He gets the tennis shoes from the window.) I paid more for them wholesale. (MR. WOLFSON hands oversize tennis shoes to GEORGIE.) You'll grow into 'em, kid.

EXTERIOR—1018 MAIN STREET / BACK YARD—DAY.

(GEORGIE runs into the back yard. The tennis shoes flip-flop—they are much too large. JACKIE is sitting under the apple tree, stuffing a donut into his mouth.)

GEORGIE: Whacha doin'?

JACKIE: Eatin' a donut.

GEORGIE: Kin I have one?

(JACKIE hands GEORGIE a donut. GEORGIE gobbles it down. GEORGIE holds up his foot.)

JACKIE: Wow! Yer better at stealin' than me an' Louie.

(CHARLIE's truck careens into the driveway. He sees the lipstick on GEORGIE's mouth.)

CHARLIE: The cunt is here! (Rushes into the house.) Anna? I kin smell your pussy. (Comes back out onto the porch and spots the bag of groceries. Tears open a bag of flour and dumps it on the ground. Smashes a carton of eggs against the side of the house. Lights a Lucky Strike by striking a kitchen match on his butt. Sees GEORGIE's tennis shoes.) Mama's li'l darlin' got—(Lifts GEORGIE with one hand and rips off his tennis shoes with the other. Throws them at JACKIE.) Burn 'em!

INTERIOR—BEDROOM—DAY.

(The BOYS are asleep in the bed. CHARLIE enters with a bucket of water.)

CHARLIE: Get your asses out of bed. (CHARLIE empties the bucket of water on them. LOUIE and JACKIE giggle and jump out of bed.) Gonna go cut down some redwood trees! (CHARLIE picks up LOUIE and puts him on his shoulders. He has a coughing fit.) How's the weather up there?

LOUIE: Okey-dokey, Daddy!

(CHARLIE moves toward the front door followed by JACKIE. GEORGIE jumps out of bed and runs over to the window. GEORGIE's point of view: on the back of the truck is a logging saw. LOUIE and JACKIE jump up on the back of the truck. We hear them laughing. GEORGIE watches as the truck pulls out of the driveway.)

EXTERIOR—THE PARK—DAY—1933.

(The park is overflowing with people. They carry signs: “JOIN THE COMMUNIST PARTY!” “LYNCH HOOVER!” “DOWN WITH CAPITALISM!” In the crowd are GEORGIE, JACKIE, and LOUIE. On the bandstand are three flags—the Star and Stripes, the California Bear, and the Hammer and Sickle. Four MEN sit on folding chairs on the bandstand, including CHARLIE and TOM HILL. Fire trucks are parked on the street.)

TOM HILL: (Rises and speaks to THE CROWD through a bullhorn.) Welcome, comrades. (Clenches his fist in the Communist salute.) Comrades, join me! (A third of THE CROWD raises their right hands in the Communist salute.) “I now take my place—”

THE CROWD: “I now take my place in the ranks of the Communist Party, the party of the working class. I take this solemn oath to give the best that is in me to my class.”

TOM HILL: John D. Rockefeller turned ninety-four last week. He drinks the milk directly from the breasts of poor women. He’s scared to death of croakin’ ’cause he knows where he’s goin’. Where is he goin’?

THE CROWD: He’s goin’ to hell!

TOM HILL: His son, John D. Junior, gives dimes to starving people on his father’s birthday. Comrades, we’re gonna take more than dimes from the Rockefellers and all the other rich sons o’ bitches that run this country.

WOMAN IN THE CROWD: You can say that again!

TOM HILL: We’re gonna take back the U.S.A. from those rich bastards—even if it means a bloody revolution! Comrades, our first speaker is a truck driver who’s out of work like the rest of you.

(TOM HILL hands the bullhorn to CHARLIE. LOUIE and JACKIE clap their hands. GEORGIE sees an empty pack of Lucky Strikes and picks it up.)

CHARLIE: Hello, comrades! Hell, I’m ashamed to tell you, but I got me a millionaire of an uncle who owns half of the apple orchards in the valley.

FIRST MAN: Mateo Lettunich!

CHARLIE: Yeah, Uncle Mateo is a law-abiding citizen. He and the other rich bastards who run Watsonville don’ hafta carry machine guns like Pretty Boy Floyd because they get the cops to do their dirty work.

SECOND MAN: You tell ’em, Charlie!

CHARLIE: Mateo Lettunich steals from us and he gets a medal. We steal a lousy loaf of bread and we end up in the hoosegow. Yeah, that’s the United States of America, the land of the free and the home of the—

(A FIREMAN turns the hose full-blast on THE CROWD in the park. THE CROWD screams and scatters. The force of the water knocks them over. The FIREMAN turns the hose on the bandstand. CHARLIE is hit full-force with the stream of water. It knocks him down. He slides across the bandstand and falls over the side.)

INTERIOR—1018 MAIN STREET / PARLOR—DAY.

(The THREE BOYS race through the house.)

LOUIE: Daddy? Daddy?

JACKIE: I guess he’s still in the hoosegow.

INTERIOR—KITCHEN—DAY.

(GEORGIE races into the kitchen. LOUIE and JACKIE follow him. GEORGIE opens the oven and pokes the turkey with his finger.)

GEORGIE: I betcha Mama made it!

LOUIE: You're uts-nay! It's Daddy.

GEORGIE: He's still in jail.

LOUIE: I betcha he escapes.

GEORGIE: Mama's turkey!

(GEORGIE reaches for a turkey leg, but LOUIE swings at him. GEORGIE ducks, and LOUIE's fist smashes into the wall. GEORGIE makes a dash for the back porch, but LOUIE grabs the straps of his overalls.)

LOUIE: Daddy's turkey!

(LOUIE wraps his arm around GEORGIE's neck and pummels him with his fist. JACKIE takes a flying leap—he lands on LOUIE's back. They fall to the floor. JACKIE punches LOUIE in the stomach—he knocks the breath out of him. He pins his shoulders to the floor.)

JACKIE: Say uncle!

(GEORGIE kicks LOUIE in the head.)

GEORGIE: Mama's turkey!

(Blood runs down LOUIE's face. Then LOUIE hits his own head with his fist.)

LOUIE: Didn't hurt none. (Jumps to his feet—he takes the roasting pan from the stove and puts it on the table.) I knowed all along it was Daddy's turkey because all Mama kin do is make weenies.

(JACKIE takes off the lid.)

JACKIE: I want a drumstick.

LOUIE: Gotta wait fer Daddy.

(LOUIE slams down the lid on the baking pan. JACKIE makes a lunge for it. LOUIE grabs the roasting pan. They have a tug of war. The roasting pan overturns, and the turkey falls to the kitchen floor. It skids across the floor—it bounces against the wall. GEORGIE tears off a leg and runs out of the kitchen. When the front door slams, LOUIE picks up the turkey, puts it in the roasting pan, and shoves it in the oven. TOM HILL enters.)

TOM HILL: I got some good news, boys. Your daddy's outta jail.

LOUIE: Where is Daddy at?

TOM HILL: He's in the county hospital in Santa Cruz.

LOUIE: He ain't gonna die or nothin'?

TOM HILL: He got pneumonia from sleepin' on the cold concrete. He gave his bunk to this ol' geezer.

LOUIE: Gee! Daddy's got a heart of gold.

JACKIE: You kin say that again.

(GEORGIE is standing in the doorway and is directly behind TOM HILL. He is devouring the turkey leg.)

TOM HILL: Boys, did you look in the oven?

JACKIE: There's a turkey in there.

TOM HILL: Yer daddy roasted that turkey for you boys this morning—just before I took him to the hospital.

LOUIE: Georgie, I tol' you it's Daddy's turkey!

TOM HILL: As soon as you eat, I'm takin' you boys to see your daddy.

JACKIE: (Glares at GEORGIE.) I'm gonna eat the other drumstick.

GEORGIE: I want the wishbone.

(The BOYS rush over to the stove.)

EXTERIOR—WATSONVILLE—NIGHT.

(It is raining as TOM HILL's tin lizzie shivers to a stop in front of a dilapidated building.)

INTERIOR—CORRIDOR—NIGHT.

(An ORDERLY leads the THREE BOYS down a shadowy corridor. He stops in front of a gray door with the number 7 on it.)

LOUIE: Daddy's lucky number!

(The ORDERLY sticks an oversized key in the lock. He herds the BOYS into the room. He slams the door. There is the click-click of the key in the lock.)

INTERIOR—BUNK ROOM—NIGHT.

(Bunk beds. A dim light bulb in the ceiling. A narrow window with bars on it.)

LOUIE: Daddy ain't in here!

(LOUIE runs over to the window and grabs the iron bars.)

JACKIE: We bin bamboozled.

(LOUIE throws a stool at the window. Glass flies in all directions. LOUIE screams out the window.)

LOUIE: I wanna see my Daddy!

JACKIE: Maybe—maybe they kilt Daddy because he's a Red.

(LOUIE jumps up and down, screaming bloody murder. JACKIE grabs a pillow and tears it open. Feathers fly all over the room. GEORGIE gets in bed and presses "Jefferson" against his face.)

GEORGIE: (Whispers.) Goodnight, Jefferson! Don' let the fleas bite.

INTERIOR—BUNK ROOM—MORNING.

(JACKIE and GEORGIE are asleep in bunk beds. LOUIE wraps a blanket around his body and he stares out the window. We see the exterior through the bars. Directly in front of the verandah is a giant redwood tree. There is the click-click of the bolt lock. The ORDERLY enters, holding a wooden tray with three bowls of oatmeal and three slices of toast. He slams down the tray.)

JACKIE: What we doin' in this hoosegow?

ORDERLY: A stopover before you go to Reform School. (He sniffs. He moves to LOUIE's bunk bed.) Pissing the bed at your age?

(LOUIE doesn't answer. He sucks on his thumb. The ORDERLY exits. LOUIE grabs the tray and smashes it against the bars of the window. GEORGIE runs over to the window. He picks up a slice of toast from the floor and gobbles it down.)

INTERIOR—BUNK ROOM—DAY.

(MR. DARDONA enters, followed by the ORDERLY.)

MR DARDONA: I'm Mr. Dardona, and I'm here to help—

LOUIS: Where we at?

JACKIE: He ain't gonna tell us nothin'.

MR. DARDONA: We had no other place to put you boys, so—you're in the Old Folks Home.

JACKIE: Huh?

MR. DARDONA: We wanted you to be near your father. (Points out the window.) Your father is over there—in the County Hospital.

LOUIE: I wanna see Daddy!

MR. DARDONA: As soon as your father is strong enough, I'll arrange for a visit.

GEORGIE: Does Mama—does she know I'm here?

LOUIE: Me and Jackie could be in the electric chair and Mama would burn us up!

JACKIE: Louie ain't lying.

MR. DARDONA: (Shocked.) You—you ought to be ashamed of yourself for—

LOUIE: Mama's a big liar.

MR. DARDONA: I talked to your mother this morning. She is coming as quickly as she can get here.

GEORGIE: Mama's comin'?

INTERIOR—BUNK ROOM—NIGHT.

(LOUIE and JACKIE are sleeping in their bunks. GEORGIE rubs his eyes as he looks out the window. We hear the click-clack of high heels. A shadowy figure appears.)

GEORGIE: Mama? Mama? I'm in here!

(We see ANNA through the barred window.)

ANNA: Who—who is it?

GEORGIE: It's me, Mama!

ANNA: Holy Mary, Mother of God. (Grabs GEORGIE's hand through the bars.) They have my little angel behind bars.

GEORGIE: Gee! It's only the Old Folks Home.

ANNA: Did your evil father get you to do something bad?

GEORGIE: I didn't do nothin'.

ANNA: I'm coming to get you.

(ANNA exits.)

EXTERIOR—OLD FOLKS HOME / VERANDAH—NIGHT.

ANNA: (Holding GEORGIE's hand.) Those old men! They are ready for the grave. They stare at me like wolves! (Stops in front of the barred window.) Yoo-hoo! Louie? Jackie? It's your mother. (There is silence except for the night sounds.) Come and get the Nabisco cookies. (There is no response. ANNA shoves the cookies through the bars of the window. A moment later the cookies land at ANNA's feet.) They are crazy—like Charlie! They will end up in San Quentin!

(ANNA picks up the cookies.)

GEORGIE: We goin' to Hollister now?

(ANNA takes GEORGIE's hand and leads him to a bench. She sits down and pulls him up on her lap.)

ANNA: Oh, sweetheart, I—

GEORGIE: Are we, Mama?

ANNA: The Professor—you don't know. He presses up against me in bed—his body is like ice. He is so old—his neck is thin—thin. Sometimes I want to—(ANNA pantomimes choking the Professor.) Oh my God, I—? (A tear rolls down her cheek.) Georgie, I love you so much, I—

(ANNA takes GEORGIE's hand and leads him through the door of the Old Folks Home.)

EXTERIOR—VERANDAH—DAY.

(A bank of fog moving over the top of the redwood trees. MR. DARDONA, LOUIE, JACKIE, and GEORGIE are standing next to a huge redwood tree.)

MR. DARDONA: You must not go near your father. I don't want any of you catching pneumonia.

LOUIE: Is it killin' Daddy?

MR. DARDONA: Of course not.

(CHARLIE approaches with a NURSE. His hair has turned gray. He pauses, swaying from one foot to the other like a sailor at sea. The NURSE tries to steady him, but he pushes her away. He continues on his own, bracing himself at last against the redwood tree.)

CHARLIE: Lockin' my kids up. They didn't do nothin', for criminy sakes!

MR. DARDONA: It was an emergency, Mr. Birimisa. We had no other place to put them.

CHARLIE: Louie, we're gonna lose our house because I can't make one lousy payment. Uncle Mateo is takin' over the payments, and he's gonna give it to his son Nick. Can you beat that?

LOUIE: Gee, Daddy, I—

CHARLIE: Shit, I got me a mind to burn down our house jus'—jus' to git even with the old son of a bitch.

LOUIE: I'll burn it down for you, Daddy! Me and Jackie is gonna git the kerosene, an'—

CHARLIE: That's only the half of it, Louie. Who d'ya think ordered the fire department to turn on their hoses in the park? Yeah—yeah—good ol' Uncle Mateo. One thing—come the revolution he'll be hanging from one of his own apple trees!

LOUIE: Daddy, when you was in jail, we—

CHARLIE: That cunt—yer mama—she signed the papers that's sendin' you to Saint Francis School. The priests will fill your heads full of shit. Ain't no heaven—no purgatory—no God! You hear me? Ain't no God! (Staggeres in the direction of the hospital. Turns around.) Ain't no God!

INTERIOR—ST. FRANCIS SCHOOL—DAY.

(MR. DARDONA and the BOYS are standing in a dim hallway. GEORGIE has "Jefferson" pressed up against his chest. A door opens.)

FATHER SUPERIOR: Mr. Dardona from Santa Cruz County?

MR. DARDONA: Father Superior?

FATHER SUPERIOR: Come into the rectory with the little ones. I keep it warm—I have lumbago in my knees. (They enter a large room that is bathed in shadows. On the wall behind FATHER SUPERIOR's desk is a large portrait of St. John Bosco wearing his priest's collar and biretta.) So these are the charity cases?

MR. DARDONA: Yes, Father.

(MR. DARDONA opens his belted briefcase. He hands a thick folder to FATHER SUPERIOR.)

FATHER SUPERIOR: Twenty-five dollars a month for their support is a pittance.

MR. DARDONA: I understand, Father. However—

FATHER SUPERIOR: It is the will of God that the Salesian Brothers turn these young hooligans into good Catholics. (Points to the painting.) Saint John Bosco. In 1841 he visited the prison in Turin, Italy, and when he realized that the children confined there had nothing before them but the gallows, he started the Salesian Brotherhood.

MR. DARDONA: I see why he was canonized.

FATHER SUPERIOR: Have they been baptized?

MR. DARDONA: Their baptism certificates are in the folder.

(FATHER SUPERIOR opens his Bible.)

FATHER SUPERIOR: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Galatians Chapter 3, Verses 26 and 27. (Rings a tiny bell. Instantly SISTER ANGELICA enters. She is over six feet tall and weighs 200 pounds. Her hands are in the sleeves of her black habit, and she is frowning at the hardwood floor.) Sister Angelica, take the littlest one to the laundry room—issue him some clean clothes. Then turn him over to Brother Joseph in the Bambino dorm.

(SISTER ANGELICA pushes GEORGIE toward the door.)

EXTERIOR—INNER COURTYARD—DAY.

(A three-sided portico, facing a lake.)

GEORGIE: Gee! I wanna be with Louie and Jackie. I—

SISTER ANGELICA: (Holding out her hand.) Let me have it.

GEORGIE: Huh?

SISTER ANGELICA: That—that—(She grabs "Jefferson" and sniffs it.) Disgusting!

GEORGIE: Give him back to me!

(SISTER ANGELICA kicks GEORGIE in the leg with her pointed shoe. He screams. She drags the limping boy along the portico until they reach a flight of stone steps. At the bottom of the steps is an archway that leads into a steamy, windowless room.)

INTERIOR—LAUNDRY ROOM—DAY.

(On the far wall is a cheap reproduction of the painting of St. John Bosco. The low-ceilinged basement room is full of dark-robed NUNS. Some are ironing, while others throw clothes into giant washing machines. SISTER ANGELICA throws "Jefferson" into a huge trashcan. GEORGIE breaks away from her, overturns the trashcan, crawls into it on his hands and knees. SISTER BEATITUDE grabs him by the legs and pulls him out of the trashcan. GEORGIE bites her hand. She slaps his face. In the meantime, SISTER ANGELICA has picked a pair of trousers, a denim shirt, two pairs of B.V.D.s, and three pairs of socks. She grabs GEORGIE by the scruff of the neck and climbs the stone steps.)

EXTERIOR—GARDEN—DAY.

(They walk past a garden of snapdragons, pansies, and geraniums. In the center of the garden is a stone statue of the Virgin Mary with Baby Jesus in her arms, and a stone bench in front of it.)

INTERIOR—BAMBINO DORM—DAY.

(They climb a flight of stairs, and enter a long room with row after row of narrow beds. Next to each bed is a metal nightstand with a Bible on it. At the far end of the dorm is another cheap print of St. John Bosco. In the corner of the room is a translucent curtain, and behind it is the vague outline of a man.)

SISTER ANGELICA: Brother Joseph?

BROTHER JOE: (Voice-over.) Yes?

(The curtains part. BROTHER JOE has thick, curly black hair, and we can see his powerful build through the worn material of his cassock. He is seated at a desk reading the Bible.)

SISTER ANGELICA: Brother Joseph, Father Superior wants this, um—this orphan—well—he bit Sister Beatitude’s hand. I am going to report his behavior to Father Superior, and—

BROTHER JOE: Why did he do that?

SISTER ANGELICA: Do what?

BROTHER JOE: Bite her hand.

SISTER ANGELICA: (Beside herself with indignation.) Why? Why?

BROTHER JOE: (Calm.) Yes, why?

SISTER ANGELICA: Brother Joe, you are—(She slams GEORGIE’s clothes on the desk and exits in a tizzy.)

BROTHER JOE: (Smiling.) Hey, jus’ between the two of us, I’ve felt like biting Sister Beatitude—maybe not her hand. (Laughs.) You one of the Katzenjammer kids?

GEORGIE: Huh?

BROTHER JOE: What’s your name?

GEORGIE: Uh—Georgie.

BROTHER JOE: Well, your patron saint is Saint George. He rode a white horse and killed a dragon with his sword. I’m Brother Joe. (Picks up GEORGIE’s pile of clothing.) I hate to do this to you, but we always run out of hot water this time of day, and guess what? You’re going to have to take a cold shower.

INTERIOR—LAVATORY—DAY.

BROTHER JOE: Take off your clothes, Georgie. (GEORGIE is mesmerized by BROTHER JOE. He quickly takes off his clothes. BROTHER JOE bends down and frowns at the bruise on GEORGIE’s shin.) How did that happen?

GEORGIE: Uh—uh—

BROTHER JOE: Sister Beatitude did this?

GEORGIE: Sister Angelica.

BROTHER JOE: It figures. (Shakes his head in disapproval. Pulls back the gray curtain of the shower stall and turns on the water.) C’mon, jump in, Georgie.

(GEORGIE gets in the shower. BROTHER JOE rubs the bar of soap into GEORGIE’s scalp, he scrubs his back, and when he finishes he slaps GEORGIE on the butt. BROTHER JOE watches as GEORGIE gets dressed.)

INTERIOR—BROTHER JOE’S ROOM—DAY.

(BROTHER JOE takes a comb from his desk and combs GEORGIE’s hair. He hands GEORGIE a rosary and a prayer book.)

BROTHER JOE: It has the Apostle’s Creed and the Act of Contrition.

GEORGIE: I already know ’em. (Points to the painting on the wall.) Uh—that’s Saint John Bosco?

BROTHER JOE: You’re a smart kid. Saint John Bosco was very poor. He believed in kindness and love, and he was the savior of orphan boys.

GEORGIE: I ain’t no orphan. Mama—she’s gonna take me outta here.

BROTHER JOE: Of course she will. Georgie, your bed will be right here—next to my curtain of a room.

INTERIOR—DINING ROOM—DAY.

(The 100 BOYS who live at the school enter the dining room. They stand behind their chairs. GEORGIE sees LOUIE and JACKIE across the room. 100 BOYS make the sign of the cross, and their voices fill the room.)

100 BOYS: "Bless us, O Lord, and these gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty, through Christ our Lord, Amen."

(100 BOYS sit with their hands on their laps as the NUNS ladle bean soup into their bowls.)

EXTERIOR—THE PLAYGROUND—NIGHT.

JACKIE: Georgie, why didja tell Father Gregorio that Louie wets the bed?

GEORGIE: I didn't tell him nothin'.

JACKIE: Did too!

GEORGIE: Did not!

JACKIE: Then how come they got Louie in the Fire Department?

GEORGIE: Louie's gonna become a fireman?

JACKIE: It's what they calls the dorm where all the boys piss in bed.

GEORGIE: Heck, I ain't no stool pigeon, for cryin' out loud.

JACKIE: You always was a liar.

INTERIOR—BAMBINO DORM—NIGHT.

(FATHER GREGORIO holds a yardstick as he walks up and down the aisle. 35 BOYS are silently undressing. They take off their shirts, pull their nightgowns over their heads, then take off their pants. All of them kneel and pray, then get into bed. GEORGIE takes off all his clothes except his underwear.)

FATHER GREGORIO: Naked? Naked?

(He quickly puts the nightgown over GEORGIE's head, and then he turns off the lights and exits. The lights are on behind BROTHER JOE's curtain. GEORGIE is transfixed by the shadow of BROTHER JOE as he takes off his cassock, and GEORGIE can see the silhouette of his muscular body through the curtain of his room.)

INTERIOR—CONFESSIONAL BOOTH—DAY.

GEORGIE: Uh—bless me, Father, for I have sinned. Um—it's bin one day—yesterday—since I last gone to confession.

FATHER CONFESSOR: Tell me your sins, my son.

GEORGIE: I, uh—ever since I bin here at Saint Francis, I ain't done no stealin'—but, uh—I had an impure thought. I am sorry for this sin and all the sins of my life.

FATHER CONFESSOR: What was your impure thought?

GEORGIE: Uh—Gee! I don' remember.

FATHER CONFESSOR: You don't remember?

GEORGIE: I guess I forgot.

FATHER CONFESSOR: (Wearily.) Three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys. Now make a good Act of Contrition.

GEORGIE: "O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended thee and I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but most of all because I have offended thee, my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of thy grace to confess my sins, to do penance and firmly to amend my life, Amen."

FATHER CONFESSOR: (Frustrated.) For the last year you have been coming to Confession every day—every single day. Most of the time you had no sins to confess.

GEORGIE: (Intense.) Uh—gee! Father Gregorio—he tol' me if I die in my sleep with a impure thought, I'm gonna end up in hell. I don' wanna go to hell.

FATHER CONFESSOR: Once a week. You may come to Confession only once a week.

GEORGIE: Gee, I can't—?

FATHER CONFESSOR: (Testily.) Once a week, my son. (Makes the sign of the cross.) "Ego te absolvo ab omnibus peccatis in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, Amen." Go in peace and God bless.

EXTERIOR—PLAYGROUND—DAY.

(The clang of the bell. The BOYS march out of the chapel. They put their rosaries in their pockets. FATHER GREGORIO is watching as FAT ABEL picks up a softball and throws it at GEORGIE.)

FAT ABEL: Think fast!

(The ball goes through GEORGIE's hands.)

GEORGIE: God darn it!

(FATHER GREGORIO slams shut his Bible and hits GEORGIE on the back of the neck with his yardstick.)

FATHER GREGORIO: Taking the Lord's name in vain! Hold out your hand!

(FATHER GREGORIO whacks GEORGIE's hand with the yardstick five times, leaving his hand bloody. GEORGIE sits on the bench in front of the Virgin Mary. He takes out his rosary and kisses the crucifix. He sees BROTHER JOE playing football with the OLDER BOYS, including LOUIE and JACKIE. BROTHER JOE's cassock is tucked into his black pants and his sleeves are rolled up. The CENTER shoots the football between his legs. BROTHER JOE catches it and fades back to throw a pass, but one of the BOYS tackles him. FATHER GREGORIO slams shut his Bible.)

FATHER GREGORIO: What are you—your cassock—(BROTHER JOE quickly jumps up and adjusts his cassock.) In six months you will depart for Rome to be ordained by Pope Pius the Eleventh, who is the Vicar of Christ on earth!

(FATHER GREGORIO scowls at BROTHER JOE, opens his Bible, and reads from it as he walks across the playground. When BROTHER JOE sees GEORGIE sitting on the bench under the statue of the Virgin Mary, he sits down next to him. He looks at GEORGIE's bloody hand. He puts his arm around GEORGIE and they go into the Bambino dorm.)

INTERIOR—BAMBINO DORM—DAY.

(BROTHER JOE pushes at the curtain of his room. He gets a bottle of iodine from the shelf. After he paints the orange liquid on GEORGIE's hand, he runs his hand through GEORGIE's hair.)

GEORGIE: Gee! I don' wanna go to hell.

BROTHER JOE: What are you talking about?

GEORGIE: (Tortured.) I, uh—I took the Lord's name in vain an', uh—I know if I die in my sleep tonight, I'm goin' to hell and I'll burn forever.

BROTHER JOE: Just go to Confession, Georgie.

GEORGIE: Father Confessor, uh—he tol' me I kin only go once a week and I already went today.

BROTHER JOE: Georgie, you are not going to hell.

GEORGIE: But—but I committed a mortal sin.

BROTHER JOE: A venial sin, Georgie.

GEORGIE: So I'll only go to purgatory if I die in my sleep tonight?

BROTHER JOE: You're not going to die in your sleep tonight.

GEORGIE: I ain't?

BROTHER JOE: I promise.

(GEORGIE wraps his arms around BROTHER JOE's waist and presses his head into BROTHER JOE's chest.)

BROTHER JOE: (Upset.) I don't want you to be late for Catechism.

GEORGIE: I wanna be with you.

BROTHER JOE: (Pushing him away.) Go! Go! (He sits at his desk with his back to GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: I, uh—

(GEORGIE kisses him on the cheek and then runs out of the room.)

INTERIOR—BAMBINO DORM—DAY.

(GEORGIE is sitting on his bed trying to untie a knot in his shoelace when ROY enters. He is thirteen and mature for his age. ROY pulls off his T-shirt and wipes his face.)

ROY: Hey, kiddo, where in heck does Brother Joe keep the basketball?

GEORGIE: I, uh—I—

(GEORGIE is transfixed by the sight of ROY's hairy torso.)

ROY: Cat got your tongue? (GEORGIE yanks at the closet door. He grabs the basketball. He throws it at ROY, who dribbles it down the aisle.) Hey! Ain't you—yeah—you're always at the gym watchin' basketball practice.

GEORGIE: Uh—gee! I, uh—

(Pause.)

ROY: What?

GEORGIE: You know, uh—when we played Aptos? I seen you win the game with a basket from the middle of the court.

(ROY shows off as he twirls the basketball on his index finger. He exits.)

INTERIOR—LOCKER ROOM—DAY.

(The BASKETBALL TEAM comes rushing into the senior locker room. GEORGIE trails in after them. He watches out of the corner of his eye as ROY takes off his jersey. ROY grins and winks at him. ROY wraps a towel around his waist before he drops his sweat pants. He goes into a shower stall—he closes the shower curtain. FATHER GREGORIO enters.)

FATHER GREGORIO: (To GEORGIE.) What are you doing here?

GEORGIE: Huh?

FATHER GREGORIO: Get back to the Bambino dorm where you belong.

(GEORGIE exits.)

INTERIOR—LAUNDRY ROOM—CHRISTMAS EVE, 1933.

(The giant washing machine and the sewing machines have been shoved to the side of the room. The 100 BOYS troop silently into the room and sit on benches. MR. ANDROVICH, a big man in a fat red tie, enters. He is followed by FATHER CONFESSOR and TWO NUNS, who wheel in a cart that is stacked high with Christmas presents.)

FATHER CONFESSOR: Welcome, Mr. Androvich! The boys have been eagerly waiting for you. Boys, say Merry Christmas to Mr. Androvich.

100 BOYS: Merry Christmas, Mr. Androvich.

FATHER CONFESSOR: Thanks to the merchants of Watsonville, we will have a merry Christmas.

(FATHER GREGORIO hurries down the steps and into the room. He taps GEORGIE on his shoulder with his yardstick.)

FATHER GREGORIO: Come with me.

(FATHER GREGORIO taps LOUIE and JACKIE on the shoulder and motions them to follow him.)

EXTERIOR—INNER COURTYARD—NIGHT.

(FATHER SUPERIOR is standing on the bench under the statue of the Virgin Mary. The THREE BOYS face him.)

FATHER SUPERIOR: I must say—it is difficult for me on such a night as this. Children, your father has—it is my sad duty to inform you that your father has gone to his Maker.

LOUIE: Daddy's what?

FATHER SUPERIOR: He is no longer with us on—

LOUIE: Where—where is Daddy?

FATHER SUPERIOR: He passed away early this afternoon in the hospital in Watsonville.

GEORGIE: Uh—Charlie's dead?

LOUIE: Daddy—he's the strongest man in the whole world.

FATHER SUPERIOR: No man is too strong to die, my son.

LOUIE: Daddy is—? Daddy is—?

(FATHER SUPERIOR puts his hand on LOUIE's shoulder.)

FATHER SUPERIOR: My son, you must understand that death comes to all of us.

LOUIE: Daddy is dead?

(FATHER SUPERIOR nods his head. LOUIE begins to cry. JACKIE is crying. GEORGIE is not crying. FATHER SUPERIOR opens his Bible.)

FATHER SUPERIOR: Your father called for a priest on his deathbed—he confessed his sins and received Absolution. Let us pray. (The THREE BOYS kneel.) "O, Lord, Jesus Christ, King of glory, deliver the souls of all the faithful departed from the pains of hell and from the bottomless pit, deliver them from the lion's mouth, that hell swallow them not up, that they fall not into darkness, but let the only standard-bearer Michael bring them into the holy light which Thou didst promise unto Abraham and his seed." (There is a moment of silence as FATHER SUPERIOR closes his Bible.) Boys, the funeral will take place on Saturday. (Speaking to FATHER GREGORIO.) They will need their Sunday best for the funeral.

LOUIE: I ain't goin'.

FATHER GREGORIO: What—what did you say?

LOUIE: Ain't goin' to no funeral.

FATHER GREGORIO: You are going if I have to hogtie you and carry you there!

LOUIE: Ain't goin'.

FATHER GREGORIO: Why you—you—(FATHER GREGORIO makes a grab for LOUIE, who races away across the playground. FATHER GREGORIO lifts his cassock in hot pursuit. He grabs LOUIE and smashes his fist into his face. LOUIE falls down. FATHER GREGORIO picks him up and holds him an inch away from his face.) You are going to your father's funeral.

LOUIE: Ain't goin'.

(FATHER GREGORIO hits him again in the face.)

FATHER GREGORIO: What did you say?

LOUIE: Ain't goin'! (FATHER GREGORIO hits him again.) Okay! Okay!

(FATHER GREGORIO's fist is an inch away from LOUIE's face.)

FATHER GREGORIO: You're going to your father's funeral.

LOUIE: I guess I gotta.

FATHER GREGORIO: You guess?

LOUIE: Uh—I'm goin'. I'm goin'.

(LOUIE wipes the blood from his face.)

INTERIOR—FUNERAL HOME—MORNING.

(FATHER GREGORIO herds the THREE BOYS into a large, high-ceilinged room that is painted a dark purple. The morning sun pours through the bay windows. There is the hiss of a radiator. There is a glossy open casket in the middle of the room. LOUIE, JACKIE, and GEORGIE cross to the casket. We see the body of CHARLIE. With his made-up face and his suit and tie, he doesn't look like CHARLIE. LOUIE and JACKIE kneel in front of the casket. They are crying. GEORGIE runs over to FATHER GREGORIO.)

GEORGIE: Ain't him.

FATHER GREGORIO: What?

GEORGIE: Ain't Charlie!

FATHER GREGORIO: Charlie?

GEORGIE: My, uh—my dad.

FATHER GREGORIO: George, get—

GEORGIE: He never—don' look nothin' like him.

FATHER GREGORIO: Go! Go! Pray to Jesus Christ for your father's sins!

(GEORGIE kneels in front of the casket.)

GEORGIE: (To JACKIE.) Is that, uh—Daddy?

JACKIE: Heck, yes, it is.

(GEORGIE looks at his father's body and smiles.)

EXTERIOR—THE FRONT STEPS OF ST. FRANCIS—DAY—1935.

(ANNA is standing under a fat, stubby palm tree. She is wearing a knee-length fur coat and a close-fitting hat with a bell-like shape and a veil. FATHER GREGORIO enters followed by the THREE BOYS. GEORGIE's hair has turned light brown.)

ANNA: My boys, how big—big and strong. Georgie? Where is—? Is that you, Georgie?

GEORGIE: It's me, Mom!

(He runs over to ANNA and throws his arms around her.)

ANNA: Sweetheart, your beautiful blond hair—what happened?

GEORGIE: Gee! I dunno, Mama.

(ANNA turns to LOUIE and JACKIE, who stand stiffly on the steps.)

ANNA: I made a special trip to the bank to get brand new half dollars for you and Jackie.

LOUIE: Don' wan' his moolah.

ANNA: What—what are you saying?

LOUIE: The old buzzard's moolah.

ANNA: (Sudden nastiness.) Louie, you have the same mean eyes as your no-good father.

(ANNA holds out the half dollar to JACKIE, who shakes his head. ANNA grabs GEORGIE's hand. She takes him behind the stubby palm tree.)

ANNA: I don't want that priest to see it. (Takes off the white glove on her left hand. We see the large diamond ring.) See? Five carets in a white-gold setting. Cost the Professor five thousand dollars. He is a good Daddy.

GEORGIE: Are we goin' to, uh—to Hollister now?

ANNA: Come September, you will be living in our beautiful home on Hawkins Street.

GEORGIE: September?

ANNA: The Professor is going to teach you to play the trombone for his high-school band.

GEORGIE: He is?

ANNA: You see, his best trombone player is graduating in June—

GEORGIE: Gee, Mom, I—

ANNA: The Professor is a good man. Violet is spoiled rotten by him. And Easter—he has taught her six different instruments. She is a genius.

GEORGIE: But, Mom—

ANNA: I have to go now, darling! Violet and Easter send you their love and kisses.

(ANNA plants a Kewpie-doll kiss on GEORGIE's cheek. She waves at LOUIE and JACKIE.)

INTERIOR—SENIOR DORM—DAY.

(GEORGIE is slipping into his swimsuit when the lavatory door swings open and ROY enters. He is naked, and in the full bloom of puberty now. GEORGIE stares at him open-mouthed.)

ROY: (Holding out his arms.) Come here! (GEORGIE heads for the door.) Hey! Hold your horses!

GEORGIE: (Stops.) Uh—I'm goin' swimmin'.

ROY: You're goin' swimmin' with me in the lake.

GEORGIE: (Turns around.) I am?

ROY: You're darn tootin' you are.

(GEORGIE is mesmerized as he watches ROY put on his swimsuit.)

GEORGIE: Gee! Uh—ain't the lake out of bounds?

ROY: I swim in the lake all the time. Do it all the time. Anyways, I'm getting outta here. I joined the C.C.C.

GEORGIE: (Disappointed.) Uh—you mean you're leavin' Saint Francis?

ROY: Two weeks.

GEORGIE: Gee! Uh—won't git to, uh—

ROY: Let's vamoose, Georgie!

EXTERIOR—THE LAKE—DAY.

(ROY takes off his swimsuit and dives into the lake. GEORGIE follows him. ROY disappears under the water. When he comes up, he is holding GEORGIE's swim trunks over his head. They swim over to a rock that is fringed by bulrushes. ROY wraps his arms around GEORGIE—he slaps him on the butt, then holds him close.)

INTERIOR—FATHER SUPERIOR'S RECTORY—NIGHT—1939.

(FATHER SUPERIOR's office is very dark. FATHER SUPERIOR is sitting at his desk. ANNA is sitting in shadows. The door opens. SISTER ANGELICA ushers GEORGIE into the office.)

ANNA: Is that you, Georgie?

GEORGIE: Hello, Mom!

(GEORGIE runs over to ANNA—she kisses him.)

ANNA: You are growing like a weed!

FATHER SUPERIOR: When George came here in 'thirty-three, he and his brothers were filthy hoodlums. Now George is an A student, Mrs. Bossert.

ANNA: My Daddy—he is outside in our brand new Chrysler. He will take us to Hollister.

FATHER SUPERIOR: Once you sign these papers, the boy will no longer be a ward of Santa Cruz County. If there is any difficulty with him, you cannot bring him back here.

ANNA: My husband is well-to-do. He played the violin with Victor Herbert at Carnegie Hall.

FATHER SUPERIOR: That is very commendable, Madam, but—

ANNA: Georgie will have the best education, and he will be living in the lap of luxury in our home in Hollister.

FATHER SUPERIOR: Whatever you say, Madam.

(FATHER SUPERIOR pushes the document across the table. ANNA signs it. Then she takes two shiny half dollars from her beaded bag.)

ANNA: Four bits for Louie and four bits for Jackie. Will you make sure that they get it?

FATHER SUPERIOR: Yes, Madam.

ANNA: You promise?

(FATHER SUPERIOR looks at the ceiling.)

INTERIOR—CAR—DAY.

(The PROFESSOR is driving the Chrysler. ANNA is in the front seat and GEORGIE is in the back seat. They drive along a very narrow, two-lane highway. They enter Watsonville and drive down Main Street, past the tiny park where CHARLIE gave his Commie speech. They drive across the stone bridge of the Pajaro River.)

(Point-of-view: from the car. A YOUNG COUPLE is sitting on a beat-up suitcase. They have their arms around each other. The YOUNG MAN jumps up and sticks out his thumb.)

PROFESSOR: (Very angry.) They will learn soon enough that they cannot live on love! (They pass a barn with "MAIL POUCH TOBACCO" painted on the roof.) Anna, tell the boy his new surname.

ANNA: His, uh—surname?

PROFESSOR: You know exactly what I am talking about.

ANNA: (Giggles nervously.) Daddy, when we get home I will sit him down in the parlor, and—

PROFESSOR: Tell him now!

ANNA: Yes, Daddy. Georgie, since your father has passed away, we have decided—well—you are registered at Hollister Grammar School under my maiden name—Gjurovich.

PROFESSOR: Yes, Gjurovich. Do you know how to spell it?

GEORGIE: G-J-U-R-O-V-I-C-H.

ANNA: Georgie Gjurovich. (She giggles.) It has a very nice sound.

PROFESSOR: What is your new name, boy?

GEORGIE: (Confused.) Uh—Georgie Gjurovich, uh—sir.

EXTERIOR—347 HAWKINS STREET, HOLLISTER—DAY.

(ANNA opens the door of the garage. Behind her is GEORGIE. VIOLET is holding GEORGIE's cardboard suitcase. A black cat yowls and runs out of the garage.)

INTERIOR—GARAGE—DAY.

(It is dark inside. There are no windows. There is a kerosene lamp on the table and an army cot in the corner of the garage. A dilapidated bureau. A clothesline across the garage with hangers on it.)

ANNA: The Professor spent months fixing it up—just for you, Georgie!

VIOLET: Phewie! It stinks to high heaven!

ANNA: Watch your tongue, young lady.

GEORGIE: Gee! Mom! Can't I live in the house with you?

VIOLET: Georgie, you are better off out here.

ANNA: I will sneak out of the house when it is bedtime. I will tuck you in and kiss you goodnight. (ANNA looks behind GEORGIE's ears.) You are growing potatoes. When's the last time you took a bath?

GEORGIE: I take a shower every Saturday, Mom!

ANNA: I'm going to give you a bubble bath.

GEORGIE: I can take my own bath!

(VIOLET puts GEORGIE's suitcase on the bureau.)

ANNA: Hurry up, Violet! It is time for you to practice the clarinet!

INTERIOR—KITCHEN—DAY.

(VIOLET, GEORGIE, and EASTER, age 9, are seated at the dinner table. ANNA puts a platter of mashed potatoes on the table and moves to the doorway.)

ANNA: Daddy, supper's ready!

(The PROFESSOR enters. He sits at the round table. ANNA serves the PROFESSOR. VIOLET, EASTER, and GEORGIE sit silently with their hands on their laps until the PROFESSOR starts to eat.)

GEORGIE: Mama, I want some—

(The PROFESSOR throws his glass of lemonade in GEORGIE's face.)

PROFESSOR: Do not speak at the supper table!

GEORGIE: Why, you—

(GEORGIE glares at the PROFESSOR. Then he quickly exits the kitchen. He slams the door.)

PROFESSOR: He's got a temper—just like his father.

ANNA: He is just a baby—he—

PROFESSOR: Anna, I am going to talk to Mr. Cohen, the Jew, about putting to work that brat of yours.

ANNA: Yes, Daddy.

PROFESSOR: Mr. Cohen will knock the nonsense out of him. Of course Cohen is from an inferior race. That is why Max Schmeling defeated Joe Louis.

ANNA: Yes, Daddy.

INTERIOR—HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM—DAY.

(20 STUDENTS sit, writing, at their desks, which have inkwells. GEORGIE is seated in the front row.)

MISS DIVAGGIO: Time is up. Stop writing. (Looks at her watch.) We have five minutes before the bell—time for some fun—time to tell jokes. (Three hands shoot up in the air.) Jeanette!

(JEANETTE stands up.)

JEANETTE: What time is it when one car passes another? (There is a long pause.) Tin pass tin!

(There is total silence.)

MISS DIVAGGIO: Do you understand, children? Tin lizzie! Tin pass tin—? Ten past ten! That is what is known as a pun. (Points.) George!

(GEORGIE stands up.)

GEORGIE: Gee! I dunno if this joke is funny enough, but—what does a soldier and a baby have in common? (A long pause.) Uh—a soldier loads his gun, and a baby loads his diapers.

(There are howls of laughter from the CHILDREN. There is a shocked look on MISS DIVAGGIO's face. She bangs her ruler on her desk.)

MISS DIVAGGIO: George Gjurovich! Stay after class! (The bell clangs. STUDENTS rush out of the room, except for GEORGIE.) I have been teaching for twenty years and I—I never—never had a student tell an off-color joke in my classroom!

GEORGIE: Gee! Miss DiVaggio, uh—I didn't think, uh—know it was a dirty joke. I—

MISS DIVAGGIO: Professor Bossert is going to hear about this!

GEORGIE: Gee, he'll have a conniption fit. He beats me for nothin'. He—

MISS DIVAGGIO: I'm sure the Professor has a good reason. As your foster father, he—

GEORGIE: What in heck is a foster father?

MISS DIVAGGIO: A foster father is an adult male who is not related to the child in his custody through any legal or blood ties. He—

GEORGIE: He's my stepfather, for cryin' out loud.

MISS DIVAGGIO: Stop lying this instant!

GEORGIE: (Furious.) Ain't lyin'. The Professor married my mom. Don' that make him my stepfather?

MISS DIVAGGIO: Mrs. Bossert is not your mother.

GEORGIE: She is, too!

MISS DIVAGGIO: Mrs. Bossert informed me that the Professor adopted you out of the kindness of his heart.

GEORGIE: I ain't no orphan!

MISS DIVAGGIO: George Gjurovich, you should be ashamed of yourself. You are dismissed!

EXTERIOR—STREET—DAY.

(GEORGIE is walking down the street with his lunch pail and books. A LITTLE GIRL who looks like Shirley Temple is riding her tricycle. GEORGIE twists his face into a grimace of rage and anger and rushes toward her. The LITTLE GIRL falls off her tricycle. She is sobbing hysterically as she runs into her house.)

INTERIOR—347 HAWKINS STREET—DAY.

(THE PROFESSOR is seated. ANNA stands at his side. GEORGIE enters.)

PROFESSOR: Boy, get my razor strop from the bathroom.

(GEORGIE exits to the bathroom.)

ANNA: I will go and make supper. I—

PROFESSOR: Stay here. (GEORGIE returns with the razor strap. He hands it to the PROFESSOR.) Drop your trousers.

GEORGIE: What?

PROFESSOR: You heard me, boy.

GEORGIE: Ain't gonna.

(They stare at each other for ten seconds.)

PROFESSOR: (To ANNA.) Send him to the garage without his supper.

(GEORGIE gives the PROFESSOR an insolent look, then exits.)

INTERIOR—GARAGE—NIGHT.

(The door to the garage is open. GEORGIE is reading Jack London's *Martin Eden*. It's a warm night and he has taken off his shirt. VIOLET enters with a meatloaf sandwich.)

VIOLET: Georgie, you—you are not decent! (She faces the wall.)

GEORGIE: Huh?

VIOLET: Put on your shirt.

GEORGIE: Okey-dokey, artichokey. (Quickly puts on a shirt.) You kin open your eyes, Sis.

VIOLET: (Turns around.) Daddy's in the parlor listening to Das Rheingold. When he listens to Wagner, he forgets everything—so I sneaked out. (Puts the sandwich on the table. Moves to the cot and picks up *Martin Eden*.) You were always the smart one.

GEORGIE: (Wolfing down the sandwich.) Jack London—he's my favorite writer.

VIOLET: You're a bookworm.

GEORGIE: Ain't nothin' else to do aroun' here.

VIOLET: You hate it here, don't you?

GEORGIE: These pants—they—(Turns around, shows VIOLET the patch in the seat of his pants.) And—and these shoes, for cryin' out loud! The soles—they flop up and down. (Moves his foot up and down. We see the flapping soles.) Tomorrow the ol' buzzard—he'll put some more glue on 'em, but—in a coupla days—holy cow! They're gonna be right back where they started from.

(GEORGIE wolfs down the rest of the sandwich. He wipes his hands on his pants. VIOLET slumps in a straight-backed chair. She is obviously disturbed.)

VIOLET: Georgie, I want you to promise me something.

GEORGIE: What, Sis?

VIOLET: (Intense.) I want you to promise me, when you grow up, you will never sleep with a girl unless you marry her first.

GEORGIE: Uh—what—what in heck is wrong with sleepin' with a girl in the first place?

VIOLET: (Furious.) What—what is wrong? You could get her in the family way, that's what's wrong.

GEORGIE: (Puzzled.) Jus'—jus' by sleepin' with her?

VIOLET: It's a mortal sin—unless you marry her first. Do you want to go straight to hell, Georgie?

GEORGIE: Heck! I yewsta sleep with you all the time and you never got, uh—in the family way.

VIOLET: Oh my God! (Delighted.) You—you don't know!

GEORGIE: Know what?

VIOLET: Georgie, sleepin' with a girl doesn't mean sleepin' with her like when you snore.

GEORGIE: It don'?

VIOLET: It's when a boy does evil things to a gal—between her legs.

GEORGIE: What kind of, uh—?

VIOLET: He gets her in the family way.

GEORGIE: How does he do that?

VIOLET: You—you don't know?

GEORGIE: Heck, ain't no girls at Saint Francis—only nuns.

VIOLET: When—when he puts, uh—his, uh—his pee-pee inside her.

GEORGIE: He puts—? Is that how—? Wow! Oh! Uh, Sis? Does the baby—does it come out of her backside?

VIOLET: Oh, Georgie—it—it comes out of her—it comes out from—from her front.

GEORGIE: (Surprised.) Really?

VIOLET: (Nods her head.) You still haven't promised me.

GEORGIE: Promised you what, Sis?

VIOLET: That you won't sleep with a girl unless you marry her first.

GEORGIE: You don' hafta worry, Sis. I ain't never gonna sleep with a girl that way in the first place. Heck, I don' even like girls that way.

VIOLET: (Very angry.) You—you are going to grow up to be evil—like every other man. You will only want one thing from a girl, and will do anything to get it!

GEORGIE: Huh?

VIOLET: Why won't you promise me?

GEORGIE: Okay! Okay! I promise. I promise! (Holds up his hands with his fingers spread wide.) They ain't crossed, Sis. I ain't never gonna go an' sleep with a girl unless I marry her first.

VIOLET: Oh, Georgie! Georgie! I love you, baby brother.

(VIOLET hugs GEORGIE.)

INTERIOR—GARAGE—NIGHT.

(GEORGIE is sitting at the table doing his homework by the light of the kerosene lamp. It is cold. He is wearing an overcoat. ANNA enters.)

ANNA: Put on your pajamas, sweetheart. It is time to greet the sandman.

GEORGIE: Awful cold in here, Mama!

ANNA: There are plenty of blankets, dear.

(ANNA gets a blanket from a shelf that is next to a can of oil. She puts it on the cot. GEORGIE goes behind the bureau. He takes off the overcoat and his pants. He puts on pajama bottoms. He takes off his shirt.)

ANNA: Why are you hiding from your mother?

GEORGIE: Heck, I—uh—

(ANNA moves closer. She squints.)

ANNA: What is that?

GEORGIE: What is what?

(ANNA runs her hand over GEORGIE's chest.)

ANNA: Hair on your chest! Just like your father.

GEORGIE: (Uncomfortable.) Gee, Mama, I, uh—

ANNA: You must have hair down below!

GEORGIE: Heck, Mama, I, uh—

(GEORGIE gets in bed. He pulls the covers up to his chin. ANNA tucks him in and then sits on the edge of the cot.)

ANNA: When your father saw your blue eyes and your blond hair—(Runs her hand through his hair.) he went crazy. He raved that you were not his child. But, darling, you are turning into the spitting image of Charlie—

(ANNA gives his penis a quick squeeze through the blankets.)

GEORGIE: Gee, Mama, I—

ANNA: When I first saw Charlie in the Old Country, I was behind the walls of a convent. I peeked and I saw him for the first time. His shirt was open and I could see the hair on his chest. (ANNA kisses GEORGIE on the lips.) Sweetheart, sleep tight, and don't let the fleas bite!

EXTERIOR—FRONT PORCH—DAY.

(The PROFESSOR carries a suitcase down the front steps to the Chrysler. He is followed by VIOLET and EASTER. ANNA is on the front porch.)

ANNA: Georgie, the weenies are in the icebox.

(As soon as the Chrysler pulls away from the curb, GEORGIE enters the house.)

INTERIOR—MASTER BEDROOM—DAY.

(GEORGIE turns the dial on the radio. There is a lot of static but he finds Benny Goodman. He turns it up as loud as it will go. He opens drawers. He goes into the closet. He looks at a steamer trunk. GEORGIE pulls the steamer trunk out of the closet and opens it. It is full of brightly colored pulp magazines. Torrid Desire and Spicy Romance. GEORGIE opens one of the magazines. He reads aloud.)

GEORGIE: "Lance carried the blonde beauty into the log cabin, and—"

(GEORGIE runs to the window when he hears the sound of a car parking in front of the house. He is worried that the PROFESSOR is coming back. Then he selects three of the pulp magazines. He puts the trunk back in the closet.)

INTERIOR—HOUSE—DAY.

(GEORGIE grabs a chicken leg from the icebox. He hears the PROFESSOR and ANNA in a heated discussion in the parlor. GEORGIE sneaks into the shadowy dining room and hides behind the door. He takes a bite out of the chicken leg.)

INTERIOR—PARLOR—DAY.

ANNA: (Very agitated.) Oh, Daddy. She has mean eyes—like her father. She—

PROFESSOR: Who are you talking about?

ANNA: Violet! Violet! Who else? She was swearing like a man. She—

PROFESSOR: Slow down, woman!

(The PROFESSOR coughs. He spits into a handkerchief.)

ANNA: She was screaming at the top of her lungs that she hates it here.

PROFESSOR: You always make a mountain out of a molehill!

ANNA: Daddy, I thought she was going to kill me.

PROFESSOR: (Disgusted look.) Is she in her room?

ANNA: I told you—she ran away.

PROFESSOR: Did she take a suitcase?

ANNA: She stole the money from my purse. She—the three dollars you gave me for groceries.

PROFESSOR: When did she leave?

ANNA: How many times do I have to—? She said she would never set foot in this house again!

PROFESSOR: Calm down, woman!

ANNA: Oh, Daddy, filthy lies came out of her mouth.

PROFESSOR: What? What are you—?

ANNA: Lies—lies from the devil—that you—that you—

(ANNA puts her hand over her mouth.)

PROFESSOR: Speak up, woman.

ANNA: That you—that you did nasty things to her—

PROFESSOR: That I did—?

ANNA: —down below!

PROFESSOR: You are—I made the biggest—(Disgusted.) biggest mistake in my life when I married you.

(The PROFESSOR exits by the front door. ANNA is sobbing hysterically, rocking back and forth. She blows her nose with a loud, honking noise. GEORGIE enters the parlor.)

ANNA: Oh, you scared me half to death! If you could—if you could only understand how hard—how hard it is for your mother.

GEORGIE: I know it ain't easy livin' with him.

ANNA: Sometimes I—never mind—never mind.

GEORGIE: What did he do to Violet?

ANNA: What—what are you—?

GEORGIE: I heard every word, Mom.

ANNA: She is the big troublemaker.

GEORGIE: I wouldn't put it past the old buzzard.

ANNA: Don't talk about Daddy like that!

GEORGIE: Jesus, Mom—sometimes you—

(GEORGIE moves toward the front door.)

ANNA: Where are you—are you running away, too?

GEORGIE: I'm gonna go look for Sis.

ANNA: Sweetheart, don't be mad at your mother.

GEORGIE: I ain't mad at you. I jus'—

ANNA: I'm so—(Moves quickly to GEORGIE. Takes his hand and kisses it.) Oh, Georgie, you are the only one I—

(There is a burst of laughter from the porch. The PROFESSOR and VIOLET enter, holding hands. The PROFESSOR's face is flushed with pleasure.)

VIOLET: (Cheerful.) Hi, Mama! What are we having for supper?

ANNA: Thank the good Lord you are not in a ditch with your throat slit. I have been crazy with worry. I have—

PROFESSOR: Stop acting like a crazy woman.

VIOLET: I was on my way home when Daddy came driving along, and—

PROFESSOR: She was only a block away.

ANNA: Daddy, as God is my witness, she swore she would never set foot in this house again.

PROFESSOR: You are hysterical. You—

ANNA: Ask her about the three dollars she stole from my purse. Ask her—

PROFESSOR: This is finished and done with. Is that clear, Anna? (ANNA opens her mouth. Nothing comes out.) Go make supper!

(ANNA looks at VIOLET with pure hatred, then exits to the kitchen.)

INTERIOR—GARAGE—NIGHT.

(GEORGIE is sitting at the table, reading *Spicy Romance* out loud.)

GEORGIE: “Jason kicked open the door. Jessica was like a feather in his muscular arms as he carried her into the bedroom, and—”

(VIOLET knocks on the door.)

VIOLET: (Voice-over.) It’s me.

GEORGIE: (Whispers.) Holy cow! (Shouting.) Just a sec, Sis.

(When GEORGIE stands up, there is a bulge in his pants from his erection. He hides *Spicy Romance* under the blanket of his cot. He puts his left hand in his pocket and adjusts his penis so it won’t show. He opens the door.)

VIOLET: What’s goin’ on?

GEORGIE: Huh?

VIOLET: I heard voices.

GEORGIE: Gee! Uh—I was, uh—jus’ talkin’ to myself. I always—

VIOLET: You better stop. People will think you got a screw loose.

GEORGIE: (Laughs nervously.) Gee! Maybe I do, huh?

VIOLET: Why did you take so long to answer the door?

GEORGIE: Uh—I had to put my pants on, for cryin’ out loud!

VIOLET: You were doing nasty things to yourself.

GEORGIE: Come on, Sis. I, uh—wasn’t, uh—gee, uh—only doin’ my homework.

VIOLET: Georgie! I can tell when you’re lyin’.

GEORGIE: I ain’t lyin’, Sis.

VIOLET: (Accusing.) Georgie!

GEORGIE: Gee! You sound like—like the old buzzard.

VIOLET: How can I sound like him? I’m a girl. (Looks at her reflection in the bureau mirror.) Mom says I’m ugly. She says I’m gonna die an old maid.

GEORGIE: Gee! She always talks like that.

VIOLET: She never says you’re ugly.

GEORGIE: I think you’re purty.

VIOLET: You do?

GEORGIE: Uh-huh.

VIOLET: You really think I’m pretty?

GEORGIE: I jus’ said so, Sis!

VIOLET: Georgie, I, uh—

GEORGIE: What?

(VIOLET sits on the couch. She is biting her fingernails.)

VIOLET: I swallowed a whole bottle full of aspirin.

GEORGIE: Uh—why didja do that, Sis?

VIOLET: (Angry.) Because I wanted to! (Despair.) Oh, Georgie!

GEORGIE: Gee, Sis! Uh—you ain't gonna die or nothin', are you?

VIOLET: I stuck my fingers down my throat and threw up. (Sits on the cot. Pushes at the blanket and spots *Spicy Romance*. She is shocked to see the cover drawing of the half-naked girl.) What? Holy Mary, Mother of God! (Opens the magazine. Reads a few lines.) You—you—oh, Georgie!

GEORGIE: Gosh, Sis, I—

VIOLET: Where—where did you get this—this—this filth?

GEORGIE: There's this trunk. It's got all these, uh—stickers in German on it, and—

VIOLET: Oh my God! Daddy's trunk?

GEORGIE: It ain't Mom's.

VIOLET: If—if he finds out that you stole this—(Waves the pulp magazine in the air.)

GEORGIE: He ain't gonna find out, Sis. His trunk is chock-full of—I don' know how many of these magazines! Must be way—way over a hundred of 'em.

VIOLET: (Shocked and angry.) Oh my God! (Throws *Spicy Romance* in the trashcan.) You're like all men—you're after one thing—one thing from a girl.

GEORGIE: I ain't like that, Sis. I'm never goin' to do nasty things to a girl.

VIOLET: (Stern.) Georgie!

GEORGIE: Heck, I already tol' you, I don' like girls that way.

VIOLET: You—you're just like Daddy!

GEORGIE: He ain't your daddy, for cryin' out loud.

VIOLET: (Hysterical.) Mom! Mom! She knows what's goin' on—what he's doin' to me, but she—oh, what's the use—what's the—what's the—?

(VIOLET runs out of the garage. GEORGIE locks the door. He sits for a moment and then he takes the torn *Spicy Romance* out of the trashcan. He sits at the table and starts to read.)

INTERIOR—347 HAWKINS STREET / KITCHEN—DAY.

(VIOLET, EASTER, GEORGIE, and the PROFESSOR are sitting at the kitchen table. ANNA is hovering over VIOLET, who is staring blankly at the bowl of oatmeal in front of her.)

ANNA: You need some meat on your bones. (Bangs the sugar bowl down in front of VIOLET.) Put some more sugar on your mush.

PROFESSOR: Leave the girl alone!

ANNA: But, Daddy, I was only—

PROFESSOR: Don't talk back to me. (Takes out his pocket watch and scowls at it.) Violet, I am leaving in ten minutes. Be in the car.

(The PROFESSOR exits. VIOLET pushes the bowl of oatmeal away from her—she rests her head on her hands.)

ANNA: Take your elbows off the table. Easter never puts her elbows on the table. She is a little lady.

VIOLET: You—you are drivin' me nerts!

ANNA: Georgie, do you hear your sister? She uses words from the gutter! That is where she is going to end up! (VIOLET rushes out of the kitchen. ANNA puts VIOLET's bowl of oatmeal in front of GEORGIE.) Eat, dear!

(GEORGIE bolts out the back door.)

EXTERIOR—HIGH SCHOOL PLAYGROUND—DAY.

(GEORGIE is upset as he walks across the playground. Among the other BOYS and GIRLS is JASPER, the school bully, big and fat. He throws a mush ball at GEORGIE, who drops his books and his lunch pail. He tries to catch the ball, but it slips through his fingers.)

JASPER: Butterfingers! (GEORGIE picks up the mush ball and throws it at JASPER. It sails over his head.) Go get it the ball, dumbbell. (JASPER rushes up to GEORGIE.) Don' take all day! (JASPER pushes GEORGIE and then trips him. GEORGIE falls down.) Get up and fight!

(JASPER takes a fighting stance with clenched fists. Smelling a fight, the BOYS and GIRLS form a circle around JASPER and GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE: (Looks up at JASPER.) Gee! I ain't got nothin' against you!

(JASPER kicks GEORGIE in the ribs with his foot.)

JASPER: Now you do!

GEORGIE: Gee! I, uh—

JASPER: You got a yellow streak a mile wide down your back! (GEORGIE staggers to his feet. JASPER punches him in the stomach, and then he punches him in the face. Blood is streaming down GEORGIE's face as his knees buckle and he falls down.) You little sissy!

(Suddenly GEORGIE is consumed with rage. He leaps to his feet—he jumps up and down, screaming at the top of his lungs in a frenzy. He lowers his head and rams it into JASPER's stomach. Then he wrestles JASPER to the ground. They roll over and over as they punch each other. GEORGIE's hands grip JASPER's throat—he squeezes with all his might.)

JASPER: (Croaks.) Uncle! Uncle! I give up!

(JASPER's face is turning purple. TWO BOYS use all their strength to finally release JASPER from GEORGIE's grip.)

BOY: Holy Moses! You almost choked him to death.

(GEORGIE sits up. He is bleeding from a split lip. He stands up and wipes the blood from his face. He looks at his bloody hands. There is a transcendent look of happiness on his face.)

INTERIOR—KITCHEN—AFTERNOON.

(ANNA is peeling an onion. She sniffs and wipes the tears with the back of her hand. GEORGIE enters.)

ANNA: Darling, I will fix you a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

GEORGIE: What's wrong, Mom?

ANNA: Holy Mary—your lip—it is swollen!

GEORGIE: Uh—a mush ball hit me at recess. Uh—why are you cryin'?

ANNA: (Nervous laugh.) I'm peeling onions for supper.

GEORGIE: Mama, let's get outta here.

ANNA: What? What are you saying?

GEORGIE: Let's take Violet and Easter and run away.

ANNA: Run away?

GEORGIE: Then, uh—we'd be happy again—like we yewsta be when we ran away from Charlie.

ANNA: When we were starving to death?

GEORGIE: We could go back to Watsonville. I bet Uncle Mateo would get me a job.

ANNA: You are still wet behind the ears.

GEORGIE: I'll be sixteen next month.

ANNA: Grown men with college educations can't get a job digging ditches!

(ANNA takes peanut butter and jelly from the icebox and puts it on the table.)

ANNA: Don't you see, Georgie? If it wasn't for Daddy, I couldn't fix you this sandwich.

GEORGIE: Jesus! Why do you keep on calling him "Daddy"?

ANNA: He brings home the bacon!

GEORGIE: But he ain't your daddy, for cryin' out loud.

ANNA: Stop talking back to your mother!

GEORGIE: Jesus Christ, Mom, you—

ANNA: Taking the Lord's name in vain.

GEORGIE: Gee, Mama, you—

ANNA: Shut your mouth or leave this house.

GEORGIE: I'll do better than that! I'll—I'll leave Hollister!

ANNA: What? What are you saying?

GEORGIE: I'll run away—run away!

ANNA: Daddy would put you in the Reform School.

GEORGIE: He'd hafta catch me first!

ANNA: Oh, Georgie, don't fight with your mother. Don't you—

GEORGIE: Reform School ain't no worser than livin' with the old buzzard!

ANNA: What—what did you call him?

GEORGIE: He's worser than an old buzzard. He's worser than a snake in the grass. He—

ANNA: Daddy is a saint! A saint!

GEORGIE: (Bitter laugh.) Saints go to heaven, for cryin' out loud. He ain't even goin' to purgatory—he's goin' straight to hell an' he's gonna burn forever and ever.

ANNA: Holy Mary! How can you say—?

GEORGIE: If he's such a saint, how come he reads dirty magazines with naked gals on the cover? How come?

ANNA: You are crazy! You are making this up!

GEORGIE: He's got hundreds an' hundreds of 'em in his trunk in the bedroom.

ANNA: That is where he keeps his legal papers. That is—

GEORGIE: Is this a legal paper? (He reaches into the front of his trousers and takes out *Spicy Romance*. He slams it down on the table.) This—this is what your saint reads!

ANNA: Oh, my God! My God, I—(She covers her eyes and turns away.) I—I thought you were different—the sweet one, my little angel. But you are just like all of my other children—you are no good—no good!

GEORGIE: The Professor's a hypocrite. He says one thing and he goes and does another thing.

ANNA: What? What are you—?

GEORGIE: He does nasty things to Violet down below!

ANNA: What? What?

GEORGIE: Putting his thingamajig between—between her legs!

ANNA: You are crazy! Crazy! You—

GEORGIE: Stop acting like you don't know. I betcha—Jesus, I betcha little Easter is next!

ANNA: (Puts her hands over her ears.) I don't want to hear any more of your filth.

GEORGIE: Jesus, Mom, you don' wanna hear the truth. (ANNA swings at GEORGIE with her fist. He grabs her by the wrist.) Don' you ever—ever try that again, or I'll—I'll—kill you!

ANNA: You—you—

(GEORGIE lets go of her wrist. Anna hits him on the mouth with her fist. He staggers backward. GEORGIE starts to hit her, but then he bangs his fist down on the kitchen table. A jar of jam falls off the table and crashes to the floor. GEORGIE is crying in rage. ANNA runs out of the front door, screaming. He takes a deep breath and hurries out the back door. A moment later he comes back in. He picks up Spicy Romance and exits.)

INTERIOR—GARAGE—NIGHT.

(GEORGIE is sitting at the table reading a story from *Torrid Desire*. He hears the bang of the screen door. ANNA enters.)

ANNA: Sweetheart? Sweetheart? (GEORGIE closes *Torrid Desire*. She sees the cover.) Doing your homework, dear?

GEORGIE: Yes, mother.

(ANNA massages his shoulders.)

ANNA: Are you mad at your mother?

GEORGIE: Nope.

(GEORGIE finally looks up from the magazine.)

ANNA: Darling, I would never let the Professor put you in the Reformatory.

GEORGIE: I know you wouldn't, Mom.

ANNA: A Kewpie-doll kiss for my precious angel. (She kisses GEORGIE on the back of the neck.) Your mother loves her sweetheart with all of her heart and soul. (She moves to the door.) Weenies and sauerkraut for supper. (She exits.)

(GEORGIE stares at the door for a moment. Then he takes a tin suitcase from the back of the garage. He puts clothes into the suitcase—socks, polo shirts, etc. GEORGIE puts the three pulp magazines in the suitcase and snaps it shut.)

EXTERIOR—DRIVEWAY—NIGHT.

(GEORGIE moves down the driveway toward the street. He looks in the window of the parlor. The PROFESSOR is sitting in a rocking chair. EASTER is on his lap. The PROFESSOR's face is flushed as he hugs EASTER and rocks back and forth. GEORGIE shakes his head in disgust and moves to the street. The PROFESSOR's Chrysler is in front of the house. GEORGIE picks up a rock and starts to throw it at the car. Then he throws it away. He walks slowly down the street.)

EXTERIOR—HIGHWAY—NIGHT.

(There are apricot orchards on either side of the highway. GEORGIE trudges along the narrow, two-lane highway. There is the mournful howl of a coyote in the distance. Bright lights cut through the blackness. GEORGIE watches a roadster with an empty rumble seat zip by. There is the sound of laughter in the night air.)

(GEORGIE picks apricots from a tree and fills his pockets with them. He sits on his tin suitcase and watches the huge full moon peeking over the horizon. He sticks out his thumb when twin beams of light flood the highway. There is the screech of brakes, and a black Model T comes to a shuddering stop. GEORGIE runs the forty feet to the car.)

GEORGIE: Uh—didja stop for me?

MAN IN CAR: I didn't stop for the man in the moon.

(GEORGIE gets in the car. The camera pulls away. We watch the Model T disappear into the distance. We see a panoramic view of miles and miles of apricot orchards and the full moon.)

FADE OUT.

THE END

INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE BIRIMISA

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George Birimisa turned 84 in February of this year. A Caffè Cino pioneer, he is recognized as one of the first American playwrights to write plays featuring gay characters who were full-bodied people, not merely victims or villains. Still writing, and working as a writing teacher, editor and activist, George took time out from work on his memoir, "Wildflowers," to talk with Steve Susoyev.

STEVE SUSOYEV: I had the honor of being present in 2006 when you won the Harry Hay award in San Francisco, for your work in gay theater and as an "inspiration across the generations." Among your students you're known as a role model of gay pride, but I understand your history is a bit more complex than that.

GEORGE BIRIMISA: When I got involved in theater in the late nineteen-forties, I went around trying to act like Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski, in a leather jacket, always with a cigarette hanging out of my mouth. I was living a contradiction, out of the closet to only a few people. Some of my plays are full of homophobia. In the early sixties I wrote my first gay play, "*Degrees*," but it was very mild and didn't reflect me or my life at all. Inching my way out of the closet. But then, in "*Georgie Porgie*," in 1968, I put it all out there, so the world would know I was gay.

STEVE SUSOYEV: "*Georgie Porgie*" was a breakthrough for gay theater. Tennessee Williams wrote, "Bravo! A beautiful, courageous play. I loved it!"

GEORGE BIRIMISA: Under the surface I was still ashamed and very guilty. I felt filthy, as if I should be exterminated. I didn't know about Harry Hay, Phyllis Lyon, Del Martin. I think New York was very homophobic then, or maybe it was just me, looking at the world through the murk of my own self-hatred. And I had plenty of it.

STEVE SUSOYEV: You were in New York during the Stonewall riot, weren't you?

GEORGE BIRIMISA: I get a lot of mileage out of my image as a radical, a revolutionary. So it's painful to admit this today, but I looked down on those brave queens at Stonewall. They were sissies and they embarrassed me. I think one of the pernicious things about homophobia is how it isolates us from the people we need most for support, and who most need our support.

I had been arrested and brutalized by cops. But when the queens were brutalized, I just wanted to distance myself from them. That was 1969. I was getting a reputation in the avant-garde gay theater. But still in that leather jacket with the constant cigarette, still viewing the world through my self-hatred. I don't know if I'm completely over it yet.

STEVE SUSOYEV: You're describing a very complex process that we try to simplify. "Coming out" seems to have taken place in stages for you.

GEORGE BIRIMISA: Baby steps.

STEVE SUSOYEV: Did you make an effort not to be gay?

GEORGE BIRIMISA: Oh, God, in 1951 I got married to a woman named Nancy, thinking that she would make me straight.

STEVE SUSOYEV: And how did that turn out?

GEORGE BIRIMISA: Well, we had three-ways with straight guys, so in some ways our relationship deepened my homophobia—tough straight guys were my drug of choice. I remember many times, walking down the street with Nancy and feeling powerful and straight—at least hoping to fool people into thinking I was not a queer. Once a gay man walked by and cruised me and Nancy said, “See, he figured out you were gay.” “He did not,” I said angrily. “Anyway, most gays are attracted to straight men. They don’t want another fuckin’ fag!”

But there were some hidden blessings. Nancy was the first “intellectual” I had ever known. My father had been a communist whose nickname was “Rough Rider.” When I was six, he gave a speech in the park in downtown Watsonville, California, where I was born. The fire department turned their hoses on him and threw him in jail. He gave his bunk to an old man, slept on the concrete, caught pneumonia and died. I had a love-hate relationship with him. He was nearly illiterate, and like so many things in my life, I was ashamed of him. But I have his fierce spirit inside me and I have been a rebel ever since. My mother ran off with a music teacher and I ended up in an orphanage at age seven. I was deeply ashamed of my poverty, and joined the Navy at 17 so I could have decent clothes to wear.

Nancy got me to read “Das Kapital” by Karl Marx and “Anti-Dühring” by Engels. Suddenly I had a language to explain how I felt in the world.

STEVE SUSOYEV: So your wife woke you up to politics?

GEORGE BIRIMISA: Absolutely. She opened my eyes. I began to understand, slowly, that gay people were oppressed just like blacks in the South and Jews during the Third Reich. And like poor people all over the world. And I wrote that anger at the unjust world into my plays.

STEVE SUSOYEV: So the political understanding moved you closer to self-acceptance?

GEORGE BIRIMISA: Oh, God, it was a long, twisting road. It didn’t take me long to learn that the commies hated gay people as much as the right-wingers hated us. For almost a year in New York I attended a group that was dedicated to turning guys like me into straight, God-fearing men. So painful to dredge this up today. When I quit the group I was disgusted. I told myself, “You’re condemned to being a fucking fag for the rest of your life.”

STEVE SUSOYEV: You don’t look like a condemned man today. To anyone looking at you now, it’s obvious that at some moment light began to shine into your life. When was that?

GEORGE BIRIMISA: I moved from New York to San Francisco in 1980, at 56, and I think I was starting to be ready to open my life to a different kind of person. [California State Assemblyman and former stand-up comic] Tom Ammiano was a sissy, and he was a very powerful person! I first experienced Tom in 1985, when I was doing volunteer work for Gay & Lesbian Outreach to Elders. I invited him to do his comedy routine at a Sunday brunch. He named all the synonyms for being queer. Words that had been flung at us all our lives, with hatred, words we had internalized. He made those words funny. He was totally out, and claimed his power as a human being. Such an inspiration.

Soon after that, when one of the scenes from “*Georgie Porgie*” was being performed, I gave my leather jacket to the actor playing the hustler and let him keep it

after the play's run. I started dressing differently, so people would see that I was gay—colorful hats with logos for GAY GAMES II or CASTRO, and long scarves, a dangling earring made of rainbow-colored beads. A slow process, but there was no turning back.

STEVE SUSOYEV: Speaking of the Gay Games, you won several gold medals in the Games, as a bodybuilder.

GEORGE BIRIMISA: Oh! Another part of my journey that involves an embarrassing example of my homophobia. Eventually I understood the political implications of what the U.S. Olympic Committee was doing when they sued the founder, Tom Waddell, to prevent him from using the name "Gay Olympics." Participating in the Physique Competition in the Games for the first time, in 1986, gave me my first sense of power as a man, and as a gay man.

STEVE SUSOYEV: But you mentioned homophobia. How did your self-hatred affect your participation in the Gay Games?

GEORGE BIRIMISA: Oh, I didn't bother trying out for the first Games, in 1982. When I first heard about the Games, I said, "What are we gonna see, a bunch of sissies tossing powder puffs at each other?" As with so many things, I had to move through my judgment to see the Games as a source of power for us as a community. Meeting and working with Tom Ammiano helped me to get there.

STEVE SUSOYEV: You've used the word "journey" several times.

GEORGE BIRIMISA: For years I was known as Mr. Pain. In the forties and fifties, I used to get on buses and people would avoid me. I gave myself to total strangers—until the age of 67, I was still paying hustlers to beat me up—but it was impossible for me to form a truly trusting bond with another person. To trust another human being is an incredible journey. I was too frightened to love anyone or anything. At that point in my life, I came to a crossroads—either get help or die in an alley with my head bashed in. I decided to get help, and ended up in the last place I ever would have imagined, a twelve-step program. In SLAA [Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous], I've had a chance to open myself to other human beings and learn to trust.

I no longer walk around with a sneer on my face. For much of my life, people never talked to me because I looked so mean. A long process and a lot of pain but I finally got in touch with my feeling and the real, loving George. I believe in a higher power that has order and incredible beauty. I am still growing spiritually at 84.

I embarked on what I understood from Joseph Campbell's writing as the "hero's journey"—going down that path and learning to open my heart. As a kid, I had no one to trust; I would have been nuts to trust anyone. Being "spiritual" for me doesn't mean necessarily believing in God. I believe in a higher power that has created an awe-inspiring earth.

I also believe that this journey is an adventure: exciting, learning something new about myself almost every day. Having the courage to go inside and find our one-ness with the world, with humanity. So much of my spirituality has come since I've been an old man. Such a blessing, with all the ailments I have—emphysema, bladder cancer, vertigo, blind in one eye—but I've come to see those as mere circumstances. Happy? Could be!

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GEORGE BIRIMISA



AFTERWORD

by Paul Sagan

“Well, I think it’s powerful.”

George was arguing with me about a scene in *The Man with Straight Hair*. In the original draft, Joey’s mother puts in a climactic appearance to reject him one more time, triggering his final downward spiral. I suggested that George was telling the audience too much. He’d already motivated Joey’s self-destructive behavior, and then some. Did we need to meet his horrible mother, too?

Yes, because the scene was powerful. To George, “powerful” can mean shocking, hilarious, disgusting, infuriating—whatever pushes an audience out of comfortable complacency into a visceral relationship with what’s happening in front of them.

“Powerful” also means scrupulously, painfully honest. In his most recent work, like *Viagra Falls*, George stops renaming his stage alter egos (Joey Jurovich, Franko Borkovich, et al.), to clarify his intent, which has always been to tell the truth about his own life. His determination to show and tell everything gives an epic quality to these later works, including the one-act *Looking for Mr. America*. If you’ve been reading faithfully between the lines, by now you know that George has lived enough for several lifetimes. Sometimes I think his own improbable life story prompted him to become a writer. Or maybe it’s the other way around: is George a glutton for experience because it provides endless source material for his writing?

He writes tirelessly and rewrites exhaustively, whether or not his work gets produced or published, whether or not he feels like it. I’ve learned to read any draft George sends immediately, because he’ll usually send a revision within twenty-four hours. Some days, this self-inflicted pressure produces gems: for instance, in this exchange from *Georgie Porgie*, is Mom ignoring Georgie or agreeing with him?

GEORGIE: Bullshit! Next you’re going to tell me I’m an immaculate conception.

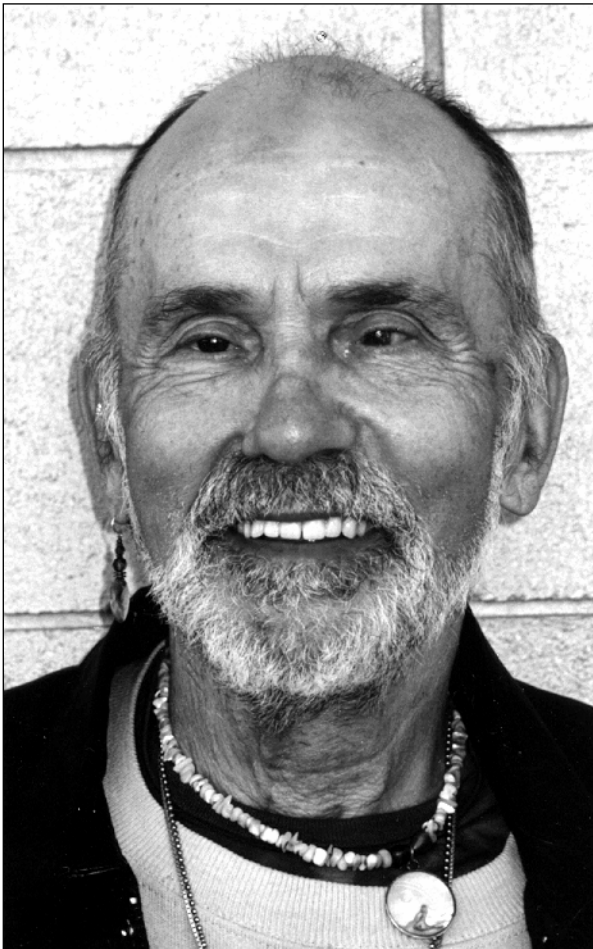
MOM: It wasn’t easy—a woman all alone.

You can spot George’s alter egos on the page at a glance because they talk the way he does: in long, elliptical statements interrupted variously by “uh,” “ah,” repetitions, and pauses. In life and on the page, this staccato speech expresses a self-consciousness about working-class origins and haphazard education. But it also conveys George’s refusal to be silenced—his insistence on being heard and seen. No one looks happier than George stepping into a spotlight. Or more entitled, given the effort it took to get there. “I loved our last meeting,” he gushed while we were planning this book. “Of course, it was all about me!”

George writes about ordinary people; that is, about disturbed personalities, raging with sexual compulsion, emotional dysfunction, and frustrated longing. He defines characters by the nature of their need for other people, usually the wrong ones. His strongest characters find ways to change: to walk away, to try again, to find the people they need, or to need whoever finds them. Above all, to tell the truth. But the truth is, most of us don't care enough to change, until we reach a tipping point of discomfort.

Back to *The Man with Straight Hair*: George eventually consented to drop the scene with Joey's mother, the latest fictional incarnation of his own mother. (She reemerged definitively as the seductive, maddening, and pathetic Anna in *The Kewpie-Doll Kiss*.) I really don't know if he agreed with me about the scene. The George Birimisa I know is the most cooperative playwright on the planet. It's hard to reconcile this polite and whimsical man with the egomaniacal, angry bastard portrayed elsewhere in this volume. Something powerful must have happened to trigger such a change.

What's left to say? Except to end George's book as it must end, with love.



George in 2005.

Photo by Jim Eilers

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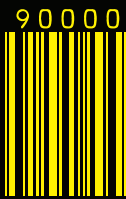
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